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A DISCONTENTED OPTIMIST

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A DISCONTENTED OPTIMIST

TEN SERMONS

By
M. S. RICE

"I say the pulpit (in the sober use
Of its legitimate peculiar powers)
Must stand acknowledged while the world shall stand,
The most important and effectual guard,
Support, and ornament of virtue's cause."—COWPER.

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TO
MY BRETHREN
IN THE
CHRISTIAN MINISTRY
EVERYWHERE

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I WOULD express my appreciation to those who, having printed some of these sermons otherwhere, have given me the right to use them here: to the *Christian Century,* for the use of the sermon, "There Is Nothing," which is printed in the volume, *The American Pulpit;* to Harper and Brothers, for the use of the sermon, "The Perfect Salvation," which is printed in the volume *If I Had But One Sermon to Preach,* to the *Christian Herald,* in whose columns appeared the titling sermon here, "A Discontented Optimist," and "Religious Illiteracy."

M. S. R.

FOREWORD

MAKING no claim to any distinguishing value in any of these sermons, they are set here as ordinary deliverances in a city pulpit.

Pressed with the multiplex duties and calls of a busy ministry, there must ever be the evidence of compelled haste upon everything we do.

These sermons were preached in the regular work that demands two new sermons every week. They stand as samples of what thousands of my brethren are doing continually all over the world.

M. S. R.

I

A DISCONTENTED OPTIMIST

"I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."—*Psalms 17. 15.*

THE psalmist worded beautifully the tireless unrest of an infinite aspiration when he wrote that famous verse so long ago. It has always been characteristically human, and, claiming it thus as characteristically human, we accept it as a distinguishment which separates us upward from all other life about us. This is not one of the commonly sought marks for proof of our evolution from a lower form of life about us here, but it is a sure prophecy of a progress which reaches on and up, and wearies not, in its idealism at least, as it sets itself to an infinite goal. I know of no more bold word of the far-reaching soul of man than this which refuses to set its satisfaction anywhere this side the likeness of that which he worships. Such a fact is almost the same as saying there is no satisfaction in reach for the human soul unless it be found in a somewhat negatived idea as the satisfaction of a never attainable ideal.

With such a bold word and complimentary presumption written thus in the Book, there

must likewise be written across the whole program of our human endeavor here a discontentment that stands forever amid whatever life may offer, and an optimism as well that looks eagerly onward toward life's highest goal. That is a mated contrariety to which I am attracted—a dissatisfied hopefulness, a troubled confidence, a discontented optimism.

I met the phrase, "We are discontented optimists," in my reading recently of some remarks made by an English bishop, E. C. Barnes, of Birmingham. Things do not seem to be exactly as he desires them to be, but he intends to push right onward and help as best he can to bring them around to his hopefulness. His exact words as recorded in the news columns were, "Ours is the discontent of optimists and not the dull despair which afflicts a decaying civilization." There is something startlingly suggestive in that remarkable sentence. It is keen in analysis of a troublous day. It is glowing with hopefulness toward a better day. It is pregnant with purpose well directed. Seldom has a sentence ever touched my mind in thoughtful helpfulness as has this one. It means: I do not just like things as they are. I have a legitimate and a religious right to a holy discontent. I am, however, not compelled to draw my conclusions there. Pessimism cannot dictate my conclusions just because I find myself now in conditions I

cannot like. I can be as discontented as Jeremiah, and still be an optimist. My faith in God must be writ boldly against everything life can bring, and never show signs of hopelessness.

Amid a world such as we to-day know this world to be, I am therefore free to announce that I am a discontented optimist. I do not like it. There is much with which I utterly disagree. There is much in society, much in business, much in industry, much in politics, much in nationalism, much in internationalism, much in education, much in theology—oh, there is much, very much, I do not like! I am not content. In fact, I am discontented. But I am an optimist. And over against all that life may come to mean in all its unsatisfactory conditions and ways, I still raise my faith.

I have always been by nature an optimist. There has always bloomed in my soul a perennial confidence that somehow, sometime, somewhere, every winter would come to spring. But rankling deep in that inextinguishable hope has always been something that made me stir in protest to life as I have found it. Optimism has never seemed a spiritual opiate to make me simply endure whatever there was, in an assurance that we would at last somehow get by. Once in college a man flung at me, in an argument we were having in a class in political economy, a biting word that never left my soul. He said in an-

swer to my remarks, "I had rather be a dissatisfied pessimist than a blind optimist." I do not know what I said, but it wasn't much, for till now I never just had the phrase. This is the very phrase I was feeling for then. I was not a blind optimist. I did not see very well, to be sure. I did not know just what I was. I was sure, however, I was not a blind pessimist. I know now my optimism has not died, though I was sure then there was something in it that in a measure justified the thrust of the student. I have found now what I wish I might have phrased then. I only wish I could remember who the man was who taunted me, and the address that would reach him to-day. I would hasten to send him the word I have long awaited, I am a discontented optimist. I am out to help bring in a better world than we have. This world is not as good as it should be. It is not as good as it could be. It should be as good as it could be. I am about to believe it could be as good as it should be. I am out, with my faith and my purpose, and everything I am and have, to help bring it round to its best. Down in my soul, the faith I have in my God compels me to believe this will be done. I am an optimist—an optimist compelled to attempt an immense task, if my optimism shall justify itself, for optimism that would rest content amid the life that now is would not be worthy the name.

"*Life* is to wake, not sleep,
Rise and not rest, but press
From earth's level where blindly creep
Things perfected, more or less,
To the heaven's height, far and steep.

"*Where,* amid what strifes and storms
May wait the adventurous quest;
Power is Love—transports, transforms
Who aspired from worst to best,
Sought the soul's world, spurned the worms.

"*I have* faith such end shall be,
From the first, Power was, I knew.
Life has made clear to me,
That, strive but for closer view,
Love were as plain to see.

"*When see?* When there dawns a day,
If not on the homely earth,
Then yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth,
And Power comes full in play."

That was Browning's declaration of this same discontented optimism. I am not satisfied now and here, but I have never suspected that such tethered words as "now" and "here" were sufficient vocabulary with which to express even me. Now and here are not much. Now and here would make a pessimist out of me if my whole measure of life were circumvented by such cloistered words. Now is a hard time. Here is a hard place. But I am no permanent citizen of

this now and here. I look away. I am a pilgrim. I feel the time-beat of my journey already in my restless feet. I am an eternal pilgrim. With such tireless facts in my biography the short breath of now is gone, and the tiny pilgrimage of here is surpassed.

"I shall be satisfied," I dare to write that desirable aspiration here now, but when I do so I push back the horizon before me so far that every discontent will have full chance to run itself all out, and I complete, therefore, the aspiration in expression by writing across it the unattainable likeness of Him whose divinity confounds me even in all the ways of my highest best. "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." With such an infinite horizon as that before me I can maintain an optimism in the midst of things that trouble me much now. I can bring my soul around to the impulses of

"One who never turned his back,
But marched breast forward;
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted,
Wrong would triumph,
Held, we fall to rise,
Are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake."

Let us look straight at this world just as it is, with all the responsibility our faith must assume therefor. This world now, with all its wicked-

ness, and all its unfairness, and all its injustice, and all its bitter rivalry, and all its fierce hatreds, and all unseemly ways; this present world we know so well needs stamped across it the evidence of a genuine optimism of faith. It will do us all well to realize that in the midst of things that plant discontent within us we still stand assured with an unshakable optimism, an optimism that is founded deep in the heart of faith in God. There need be no fear now of any liability of a blind optimism. There is too much that thrusts bitterness into even the best of life for anyone in any of the great troublous questions of the hour to be in any danger of being lulled into a senseless sleep. Life is too badly struck to-day to produce a blind optimism. I remember seeing somewhere a fine little story as told by Mark Guy Pearse, that persuasive preacher of England's recent day. He said he went once to visit a meeting of what he called "The Guild of Poor Brave Things." He found there an unusually cheerful meeting in progress. The congregation was made up of brave little invalids, who had come painfully there on crutches and canes and in wheel chairs. All this essential machinery of their badly broken mortality had been piled up in a depressively impressive sort of a pile that told the tale of that gathering with an eloquence no words could enlarge. The preacher found, as he came up to the door, a tiny ragged girl on the

steps. She was crying vigorously as she looked through the windows at the party she could not attend. Thinking he might do a kind deed under the inspiration which was in his heart from the promptings of the hurt happiness whose convention he had come to attend, Doctor Pearse asked solicitously what the heart-break was. The little troubled shut-out girl replied between her genuine choking sobs, "Oh, sir, I can't get in there 'cos I ain't got nothin' the matter with me." We, as a civilization, and as a race of eager souls set toward destiny, will not suffer the inconvenience of being shut out of a great final meeting for the reason we have nothing the matter with us. What we are needing now is a persistent optimism that can discontentedly dwell in an unideal day and age and in such a time keep up heart and hope.

The task to which the Christian religion has been assigned in this world, when honestly faced, will either drive dark discouragement into the heart or else compel a profound faith in God. It is because of this keenly drawn alternative we have always found the extremes of religious manifestation attendant upon periods of great difficulty in the world's life. Mankind has been driven to God for help in a condition unwilling to be surrendered, but which is recognized as far beyond its own strength to retain; or has abandoned it utterly in the heavy spirit of hope-

less discouragement. Constant meditation upon such a world as we have now is quite enough to drive weak hearts to despair, and such a declaration will require some remeasurements as to what we mean by weak hearts. Some boastingly strong hearts are troubled. There is much in the world none of us can countenance if we dare call ourselves Christian. There is much we are set to strive against. Wrong seems well intrenched. War, desolation, sorrow, madness, suffering, poverty, starvation, pestilence, anarchy, and many more of the shamefully familiar things are not the caliber of things we expect to find playing only upon weak hearts. These great iron-booted things come trampling with heavy feet over the strong-hearted also. We need not wonder at all if the call for help in our day shall come from places where heretofore men have thought confidence has dwelt.

Can there be any deliverance? Men's ears are keen to hear the answer to such a persistent question out of our troubles. Can Christianity offer any solutions? Are the forces of the gospel of our Lord Christ rugged enough and powerful enough to actually lift ancient empires out of their desolations and clear effectual routes for a world's deliverance? We have grown used to an expression of power that is made in terms of vast storages of TNT, that under lightning bolts let loose along our peaceful coasts will shake a

continent. Can we, of such a power-drunk age, safely place our hope in the workings of a gentle gospel?

We are now as a world where we can grasp somewhat of the meaning of the great task which has been laid upon the shoulders of the institution that dares set itself to the ideal of making out of this world a place where men and women, such as we are, can actually live in a manner that becometh our claim of brotherhood under our belief in the common Fatherhood.

Christianity has come along down strange centuries and found everywhere and always the manifestation of her divine commission, until, as someone has said, "the little parochial millennium of the Jews has now become the universal expectation of the whole race, and the limited personal salvation of the individual has been enlarged into a vast design, extending its dominion to every faculty and interest and prospect of our many-sided nature."

We do not feel in this present world any of the convictions of a finished career. We are not convinced of the breakdown of old age. We are rather constantly swept with a marvel of new ambitions. We are finding every day the evidences of new possibilities. We have caught step for a long journey. Visions and dreams and passions are sweeping our souls.

In the midst of it all we stand with our faith.

What have we to say to such a day as this? Only a shortly gone yesterday our attitude seemed to be one of endurance. "We can stand it," we doggedly said, and with stoic determination we lifted our eyes to a delivering to-morrow. Ultimate escape from it all was the best we offered the dissatisfied world. The attitude was but scant improvement upon Nirvana and Buddhism. Nirvana offered the world a leap into the dark, hoping it would be dark forever. It was escape by annihilation. We thought of the wrongs and oppressions, and of all the evil things about us here, and met them with a quenchless hope that one glad, good day we would make our eternal escape.

That is not our program. We have a greater determination than escape. We refuse to be submissive pessimists before difficulty. We appreciate how hard the task before us is. We are not content to tolerate evil. But we plant our optimism with our discontent in the very midst of life we cannot approve, and propose to make it the sort of a life it should be.

Christianity to-day goes marching its protesting way against every evil thing among us, determined to change it. We are glad to own to a discontent which protests every wrong thing. We acknowledge such discontent with the flavor of an optimism that is founded upon our triumphant faith in God. We believe in the ultimate

triumph of good. But we acknowledge a bit of lazy flavor in such a faith. It might become easily a mere toleration of things here, in the limber idealism of a mere escape some day. We have a faith that is not content that any wrong should be comfortably intrenched anywhere. There was but recently broadcast across our land an appeal of the Federal Council of Churches to employers, labor leaders, and the public in general, that they unitedly seek to employ, in all present-day industrial problems, "the implications of the gospel of Jesus in its bearing upon economic and industrial welfare." It is the immediate testimony of the very fact I am contending for. We are discontented with conditions as they are, but we are optimistic as to what they will be.

This is our position in the whole world situation. We are discontented optimists. We are discontented with the whole hideous fact of war. We are ashamed of the great long-tolerated, bleeding fact as it has trampled its red-booted way across our suffering world. We protest it as an insane method of adjusting differences. We are discontented even unto rebellious disgust at the whole idea of war. But, under the leadership of the Prince of Peace, we are optimists as to the final outcome here, when we shall at last have driven it away from our world forever. We are discontented with the whole international

relationship of our day. But we do not despair of it.

We are discontented with the drunken dissipation of a world that continues to reach for a stinging whip of alcohol to drive its sometimes flagging pulse into a semblance of enthusiasm. We are discontented with the present condition of the great prohibition reform that has been so designedly attacked by wicked men and women who would set personal profit and individual indulgence above any reform. We are discontented, but we are optimists in the determined hope that some day we actually will drive drunkenness out, and will sit down with the triumph of sobriety in the nations of the world.

We are discontented with the harsh, repulsive story of vice, as it is brought to us, of our own great city, and of all this fair land of ours. We hate the presence of this dirty thing anywhere. Its stained hands are reaching for everything in life we really prize. Its ribald laughter goes echoing down the dark ways of its shame. But we have an optimism that stands in our discontent. We are discontented with vice, but we have a great abiding content in our confidence in virtue.

I must not list here, now, more of the specific things of our discontent. Let me spread a blanket charge over it all. We are discontented with sin. Sin is this world's trouble. Under the

false banner of happiness sin has enticed a whole world into the ways of death. We are discontented with sin. But our discontent is accompanied by an optimism that stands buttressed in faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour from sin. We plant the flag of our hope in the midst of everything sin has wrought, and tune our optimism to the sure day coming, when sin shall be no more, when all tears of sorrow shall be wiped from our eyes forever, and when Christ shall be all in all.

This world can be made a good world. The evil that is here need not be, must not be, shall not be. The blood of Jesus Christ was not poured out upon this world to merely make here and there across it the possibility of escape for some favored few. "This is a redeemed world." Those who believe that are challenged to make it, as speedily as possible, a saved world. This is the compulsory fact that should make enthusiasts out of Christians everywhere. It should consume our lives with passionate devotion.

I am discontented. With Jesus Christ, however, I am a discontented optimist. Defeat does not haunt me. Christ is divinely bound for the citadel of humanity. The task of our Lord is the world. We have actually come far on the way. Let none of us now lose heart that we yet have far to go. I believe in God, and he posts the log of his kingdom on this earth. He has

given definite promise which bears upon the establishment of his kingdom here. He has written for us of the flowing of the nations to the mountain of the Lord's house; of that wonderful day when they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain; of the time when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. We believe in God. We lift our eyes out of the sin and sorrow of to-day, and look away, discontented optimists. He shall reign forever and forever.

II

THE CHRIST OF THE HUMAN ROAD

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."—*Hebrews 13. 8.*

A HAUNTING word for a haunting fact. This great divine Attendant of ours, unwearying across all the way he has come, and to be unwearied across all the way there is yet to go—Jesus Christ the Eternal Contemporary. He has not failed; he does not fail to-day; he will not fail to-morrow. What a tonic for our faith such words are! The Christ of the Human Road! I would dare correct to enlargement the fascinating phrase that has come out of India with our great missionary there. Not to question at all everything he is for India, but to hail him adown every road everywhere, where go stumbling and struggling men and women and little children. Jesus Christ is the Christ of the Human Road.

We are confident. It is not ours to be compelled to carefully diagnose our day's ailment before we dare determine whether or no this gospel we declare is applicable. All that was in and is in God's knowledge. Jesus Christ is God's universal answer to every arising need of every

possible age, and it is in the confidence of such a fact we preach him. We preach him as having vindicated himself in the past, and as to-day manifest among us, and assured that in an even greater to-morrow he will prove himself the supreme and only Saviour of the world.

There inheres in this daring text the bold acceptance of a task which only God could assume. Men do not talk so. Men are of an age. Even our great men are distinctly the creatures of their generations. That is the kindness of history. It holds its characters confined to their own familiar day. The only way human glory can last is to be holden in its native setting. To read the story of the "Little Corsican" always interests and thrills. But it must be set exclusively in the terms of a day in which he was a logical result. He not only would not fit to-day, he would not be tolerated. Alexander may continue to hold his empty title as a world conqueror, weeping for more worlds to conquer. But to-day, knowing a world within the world he thought he had hammered into submission, and which was even then laughing at his little claim, we would insult his sniffling lament if he came again and exhort him to attend to the world within reach.

History preserves men where they appear. Only Christ comes on. He is of no age. He is of every age. The better we can come to know him the more we will realize his divine univer-

sality. Christ of forever. He is not weary. He is not confused. He is the universal Christ, yesterday, to-day, and forever. We record all the past for him; we proclaim him for the present; we pre-empt the future in his name.

This is the ever-fascinating and challenging program of Christianity in this world. It is the reason we build churches, and not memorials. Had Jesus Christ finished his way on yonder green hill in Palestine, we would not be building churches for him down every great streaming street of a whole world's cities two thousand years after his passing. We would, if we did anything about it at all, be building a few sad monuments for him, adorned with symbolic quenched torches and facing the past as mere memorials. We would be reading his story of kindliness, and sorrowfully thinking of the injustice of his death, as we do of Socrates.

But there is nothing about this Lord of ours which tends to make us leave him to the past. The past cannot hold him. He is untrammeled by the ages. He was theirs of long ago. He is ours of to-day. He will be theirs of a to-morrow that will have raised markers above all our tiny graves. But no grave for Jesus. No monument for him. He is the Christ of the Human Road, and he will walk it all out to the forever end of it. O earth, earth, earth, hear this great word! Your eternal Contemporary is come.

A few months ago we were disgusted with the widely heralded news of a young fresh-arriving Messiah. After the bold heraldry had died down and the claimant had been exhibited by his cult across our continent, he was taken away, and the undisturbed age went along its strenuous task to realize that you cannot just arrange, by some mystic formula, a Messiah. One of our great newspapers in comment upon the strange incident titled its keen editorial "Too Weak." A short time ago I happened to be in an Eastern city when the Jewish people were putting on a campaign of education. Many prominent men among them spoke for their campaign, asking a large sum of money to meet their need. The rabbi in charge of the meeting announced one fine gift from a wealthy man, and as he announced it he said, "We stand ready, if need be, to continue this campaign until the coming of the Messiah."

I speak, and shall count every day I can live a privilege to speak, of One who has been coming along down the human way for two thousand years with an ever-increasing interest, and who is forcing his divine way into a world's reckoning. He who can at all hear the trampling trend of the feet of the world's going must discern clearly to-day that Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour of the world, is here. If you desire to have a part in this transitional era making toward a triumphant to-morrow, with certain

step join now the cause of the Nazarene. Put your contribution into his cause. Espouse his church. Enlist in his campaign. Bring your whole influence and join in his great ascendance. When I saw a great army of marching men go their measured way along, I found myself keeping step and marking time with feet, hands, and heart. The march, march, march, of it all! Rudyard Kipling has written it into the throbbing strophe of that pounding poem in his compelling way—"Boots! Boots! Boots! Boots!" You cannot read the going words without catching step. The very same impress will come over you when you read this text verse, and hear its tread coming along down all the yesterdays, and feel the very throb of the presence of to-day, and in prophetic confidence you gaze on into eternity: Yesterday, To-day, Forever!—the measure of the unfaltering march of the eternal Contemporary.

1. Jesus Christ, yesterday! The Christ of history. The prophet hath no part now in this estimate and consideration, for we are to be left alone to the records. There was a day when the prophet was the dominant religious figure. He stood gazing down the coming centuries ahead, and marking the attendant signs by which Messiah would be known, he boldly said, "Ye shall find him"; "Ye shall call him"; "Ye shall know him." The prophet was a great and an eloquent figure. But now, we stand before an accumu-

lated experience of a world having had twenty centuries of contact with our divine Lord, and can look back with our historians to mark the credentialed way he has come. The Christ of history! With what divine impression he has marched down all the centuries!

Yesterday! We need not speculate now. Send for the records. Did this gospel we prize so much to-day have any genuine part in the story now gone? Or are we merely pluming our doomed mortality with a sprig of green, as a mere emblem with which we can turn away from an already faded-out yesterday, and with a so-called evergreen in our eager hands turn toward a to-morrow across which we can with determined faith write a hope?

Yesterday! What of it? Well, this much of it for sure, it has been written. We can get the records and call them to witness. Whenever you bid for attention now, you can be called on the record of yesterday. Records are records. They do not admit of sentiment in expanding. They just stand records. If greater prophets should suddenly appear among us than ever stood in the great expectant days of long ago, they could not, with all the kindling hopes they could set across the horizon of the dawning to-morrows, bury the records of yesterday. We can bring our questions to the records of the past and ask them as boldly as we may please.

The Christ of yesterday! Bring the books! Two thousand years are involved in the claim we make. What have they in record of our declaration? Do they refresh our word or do they silence our claim? A few years ago, before a crowding congregation in Carnegie Hall in New York City, a famous rabbi startled his hearers, and found his words emblazoned in the news of the world the next morning, when he said, "Contrary to what I have been taught as a lad to believe, I now know that Jesus Christ was not a myth, but a man." The speaker then proceeded to pay a very high tribute to the teaching of Jesus, and, of course, to prod Christianity for not having lived up to the high standard set for us. Numerous rabbis were greatly moved by the address, and the speaker was bitterly assailed and answered with rebukes. The controversy attendant upon it all has died away now, but the testimony of the word, as toward yesterday, is all that I had in mind in citing the incident here. We can actually walk back through all the centuries, from this great progressive, proud, rich, wicked, scientific day of ours, on and on till that strange heaven-awakened night in Bethlehem, and find in every century along the way the sure testimony to the Christ of yesterday.

A number of years ago I read a little book which was in my father's library bearing the title *The Bridge of History.* It was written by an

English preacher named Thomas Cooper. That little book made a lasting impression on my way of thinking. His effort in the thesis was to go backward along the bridge of history, which was built of nineteen arches, and make careful inquiry as to whether or no this Christ of ours had actually been there. The roll call of the evidence he found was indelibly impressive.

Is it true that Jesus Christ is a character actually believed in to-day? Century by century we can easily call for testimony. The accumulating evidence becomes impressive as the names and declarations of the witnesses are called. It is an excursion along the recorded way of history that is not difficult to make, but is conclusive in its testimony. The evidence of Jesus Christ is established in history. Two of the most distinguished lives of our Lord that were ever written were carefully compiled by men who claimed not to believe in him—Strauss and Renan. Neither one of them ever questioned him historically. They simply undertook the impossible task of accounting for him in a natural way. You cannot walk the ways of history and avoid the impressive presence of Jesus Christ.

One day in the home of Sir Ralph Abercrombie a company of literary friends and scholars were being entertained at a dinner. During the course of the conversation about the table, one of the guests projected a somewhat queer-sound-

ing question which sprang from his own meditation rather than from the drift of the talk that had been. He inquired thus, if every copy of the New Testament had been destroyed at the end of the third century, the time when Emperor Diocletian was actually trying to destroy them, could it have been recovered entire from the works of the scholars of the second and third centuries? The question involved so very much difficult literary research that no one present dared to venture an answer, and the inquiry died out in the echo of its own asking. Two months later Doctor Buchanan was at the home of Sir David Dalrymple, the great Scotch judge. After they had talked together for some time in the conversation of their common interest, the great jurist asked his visitor to come with him into his library. Large tables stood closely placed in the great room, and upon them opened volumes of ancient scholars. "Do you remember that strange question which was asked by someone at the table of Mr. Abercrombie—a question which we all allowed to pass in the mere asking?" inquired the judge. "That question went into my attention and aroused my interest. I knew I had in my library the works of all the extant scholars of the second and the third centuries, and for my own interest I began the research to seek an answer to that question. Up to this hour," said the scholar, as he pointed to the collected books and

manuscripts, "I have found the entire New Testament with the exception of eleven verses."

There is the record! The Christ of History is no myth. Tertullian, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria; Jesus Christ of yesterday has been established. He has pried the very ages apart in their theretofore uninterrupted way, and implanted himself in the very midst of time, so we now reckon our world's doings on a calendar whose very figures recognize him. His name is stamped down the story of history, and to-day he holds yesterday secure.

2. The Christ of to-day. The Christ of experience. We cannot conquer a world of active expectant living with a religion of the past, no matter how secure and impressive that past may be. Yesterday is gone. The very breath of death clings to the word. The past may be a genuinely effective time in which to gather the foundations for our hopes, but we cannot live on the past. Yesterday is the word of the dead. To-day and to-morrow sound the tocsin stroke for real life. Did yesterday bury this Lord of ours? That we who live to-day want to know. It is not enough for me to know Christ lived yesterday. So did a great many others. Is he fast locked in the cold charnel house of the past? This is the question pounding against the eager anticipation of a living now. What could we ever hope to do with so virile a day as to-day is, if all we had to bring

it was a Saviour of yesterday? Religion that cannot keep a corrected calendar up to the very last living minute of an eagerly adventurous to-day and carry its throbbing experience right along the toiling way of now cannot hope to be a religion in a live world. I have just been through one of the very greatest technical libraries on mechanics in all the world. The man who walked with me there, one of the world's greatest research minds, said, as he pointed to the eager workers busily engaged over the pages of the volumes, "This library must be up to date. We are engaged here in work for this present world, and up to the very latest thing that is known in every line of mechanics, we must be informed. Books are soon out of date here. On many lines books that are a year old are useless. In some lines we must discard books of but a few weeks' findings."

There must be, in our Christian appeal, some conscious knowledge that this Christ of ours is not a creature of the past. He must be the Christ of to-day. Great that he was in all those wonderful days of old; divine that he was in his impressive goings about Galilee; tender that he was in his marvelous ministry of loving kindness; firm that he was with his stinging whipcords to drive out of the Temple the false bargainers, yet this Christ must be the Christ of to-day, where divinity, and tenderness, and firmness are just

as much needed and just as evident as they ever were before. Let us not be misled by these folks who, in self-satisfactory unrighteousness to-day, cry out because they may find their comfort dislodged in the actual presence among us of the living Christ. It is but the re-echoed groan of the Pharisees of old whom Jesus scourged. Christ to-day is the Christ of a rigid righteousness which is pounding at the foundations of every unrighteous thing on earth. He is not sealed up in the goneness of the past, there to be admired as the Christ of yesterday. Every to-day will become a yesterday fast enough, and consigned to that rapidly becoming past, no to-day must ever be bound up in those pages that fails to show clearly the impress of this living Christ upon it. This living Christ! This redeeming Christ! Alive now to every helpfulness divine interest can give to every needy thing. Alive now to every condemnation which must be felt by every evil thing. Christ of God, Christ of yesterday, Christ of to-day, Saviour of the world.

I have a letter from a man of our town to whom great sorrow has come with crushing suddenness. He has for long been absorbed in business. This is such a business day of ours. So frequently these men of great business become enamored of business, which they presume, demanding so much of their time, must also provide secure satisfaction, only to find that when

sorrow strikes it, it goes down like a house of cards. This man of to-day wrote me an impressive letter, and in it came these sobbing sentences: "I find myself groping about for help. I realize that, if I had equipped myself, I would be able to fight this sorrow with more strength and bring myself just now a greater consolation." That is the exact minute to which we expect a present Christ to come. Christ for to-day. Yesterday is history. To-day is experience. No sorrow too deep. No evil too bitter. No temptation too fierce. No problem too difficult. We match our Christ against everything to-day can be.

3. The Christ of to-morrow. The Christ of destiny. With that forward facing word we fling ahead the confidence this Lord of ours has set in all our souls by virtue of all the past and by the experience of the present. We announce our expectation of the future. One of America's greatest political statesmen said in an address he delivered in our city recently this statesman-like word for our country: "A government that does not look forward will not long have a chance to look backward." It is that same vital fact, written in the imperishable terms of religion, which we announce in the forward meaning of our tireless Christ. We have come on through enough history to be convincing. We live now amid experiences that cannot be questioned. We

raise our eyes unto to-morrow with a hope undeniable. Jesus Christ is always divine enough to be sufficient. That is about all we can do with the matter of destiny—announce our faith and look confidently forward.

In the midst of this great proud age of ours we hear still the muffled tread. With all else it is, as with all it may yet become, it is a dying age. We might just as well write that solemn fact in. Death is before us. Rich age! You must die. What good is all your gold? Wicked age! You must die. What hope have you in your sins? Scientific age! You must die. What can you do then with your test-tube and your scalpel? Death stalks mankind. Hence it is always time to do straight thinking into it. All that destiny can mean is wrapped up in such a fact.

I take my stand in this to-day, and gaze steadfastly on into to-morrow in the assurance of the great and unfaltering faith that has come on through the yesterdays and intrenched itself victoriously in to-day, to feel no anxiety about forever. Jesus Christ the same forever.

Christ of my destiny, I greet thee with an unfaltering faith. I am asured that nothing can ever separate those who trust thee from the security of every lengthened to-morrow.

The Christ of history! The Christ of experience! The Christ of destiny! Thou art the Christ of the human road. We give thee our allegiance.

III

THE CHRIST WAY

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way."—*John 14. 6.*

I SAW somewhere in my reading the phrase, "Christ the world way." It is, in my judgment, the most needed conviction for the Church of Christ on earth to-day. Jesus Christ the way; not a way, but *the* way. That is the only incentive for enthusiasm to me in the religious program. My hope for the world, and my confidence which grows out of that hope, is that one victorious day this whole world is going to find this safe and delivering way, and along it will be brought out of all its clouds and storms, out of all its blunderings and battlings, out of all its strifes and sorrows, out of all its troubles and tears, into the daylight of peace and progress that shall lead it into the ever-ascending path that runs away straight to the throne of God.

We are suffering just now throughout Christendom from a denatured conviction in our faith. "Christ or chaos" is my faith. I am not seeking for some secret by which we can accomplish a great general agreement of all religions. I do not see any possible way for such a thought to find a lodgment in any religious interpretation.

Jesus Christ is not just one of the great leaders and masters of human thought. We allow ourselves an utterly false confusion whenever we permit the name of Christ to be written into the list, however great the names may be, if it be a list of human leaders. What Christianity needs to-day is a profound conviction upon the divinity of its Christ. His loneness. His profound distinguishment as the Son of God. He teaches the way of God in truth.

Whenever you begin a discussion about religion you find yourself faced by the fact of its oneness. You cannot harmonize religions. There can be but one true religion. You cannot multiply religion and preserve it. God must be exclusive if he be God. The multiplicity of gods is the destruction of all gods. Religion to be true must be absolutely exclusive. "There is no alternative between universal collapse and universal sovereignty." That sentence came into my thinking a good many years ago in a book on *The World for Christ,* by Dr. A. J. F. Behrends, and has been one of the molding influences in my whole way of religious thinking. There is no pulse of bigotry in such a thought. It is, rather, the recognition of the fundamental fact which underlies all religion.

The only reason Christianity has ever had and has preserved, for now well-nigh two thousand years, a genuine enthusiasm for Jesus Christ, is

couched in the fact that we do believe him to be the Christ of God. There can be no compromise nor concordats. We are Christians only because we believe Christ to be absolute truth. We believe Christianity is the only true religion. A religion that is not the true religion cannot remain, nor should it remain. Such a belief compels our endeavor to establish it everywhere, and is the vital fact from which the missionary movement springs. Our belief can be made good only by universal and exclusive sovereignty.

The Christian campaign for the world is the compelled logic of our faith. We cannot hold such a faith locally. The Christ has no national or racial destiny. He must be interpreted to humanity, and his sovereignty must be established around the world. The certain test of the true faith is its ultimate survival. Not the survival of a period, be that period across many centuries even. The test of the ultimate fact is to be made in that coronation that will take place beside the graves of absolutely all its competitors. Neither science nor philosophy can ask a hearing on matters that can claim truth only on a limited scale. Truth by its very nature must be careless of all boundaries. It pushes back the last horizon.

I would wave this recognized fact as a banner before our faith in the Son of God. We do not consent to place Christianity merely as one of

the many religions among men. We do not place our estimate upon it as merely a bit purer than other religions, and susceptible of being enriched by them. We are not set into a future of our faith, in which we hope to be able by cultivation of many other and great faiths that have held forth among men for ages, to bring about a mixture which can be rated as the ultimate in religion. The Pantheon at Rome is the monument to such folly. When they sought there to find an enthronement for all the gods, they most certainly accomplished an arrangement for the dethronement of them all.

There are but two possible results which can come in the religious controversy. All religions now known must go, or one of them must become regnant. All sacred books must be discarded, or one find its place as the Book of God. Jesus Christ must either be written as a name among a somewhat lengthy list of men who have taught humanity well across the ages, or else he must stand alone in the recognition of the divine fact that there is no other name. It is for just such an actual appreciation of the faith we profess I am concerned now. I believe profoundly in the fact that the cause of true religion in this world to-day is suffering because of a slovenly belief among us.

I have three simple declarations of the faith which I wish to set glowing in the minds of all

who may do me the honor to read this sermon. Those declarations were printed as a creed on a card sent me recently by someone who had read a sermon of mine that had been printed. The three simple statements, with a bit of haunting alliteration, struck into my memory. "I believe Christ's life is the path, Christ's death is the price, Christ's resurrection is the proof of our faith." It is a comprehensive summary of Christ the way. I desire to say these three things into the expression of our distinguishing faith.

1. Christ's life, the path. "I am the way"—Christ's own word. Jesus Christ *the* way, not *a* way. Such words from any other lips would sound like supreme egotism, and long, long ago would have been forgotten in the very assumption of them. It is indeed one of the interesting facts about our Master, to read his words, and mark how his divinity has forever spared him the reputation of an egotist. His talk could not be indulged by little folks. "I am the way!" Hear it, you lost soul! Hear it, you lost world! "I am the way!" This is bold talk and cannot be interpreted in any other than divine confidence. Would you know the measure of judgment it carries, go you down even the familiar streets of your own neighborhood, or try within the closer confines of your own home to indulge such talk yourself. Yet here is a word that has been preached, shouted, posted across the ages and be-

fore the world. A word that has been making its challenging way into every troubling human relationship. A word that has been offered to a wayward humanity. And after two thousand years of ever-widening challenge we hear it today with increasing respect. I do believe it is even now getting its evidence into attention where nations are wrangling, and Jesus Christ will one very great world-day show this whole world this routing truth. Whatever the trouble whose menacing liability may trip the step of individual or nation or race or age, the same sure delivering way is before us. My hope for the world, and my confidence toward all the future, is that this whole world is going to find and take this delivering way.

I was not surprised to find in reading along in the midst of that impossible book which H. G. Wells undertook to write, a history of all time in one volume, that he wrote this word about Jesus Christ: "The Galilæan has been too great for our small hearts." That great solemn and confounding fact is arising in convincing proportions around our whole civilization. Back of very much of the significant unrest of the world we must recognize the influence of Christ. There will never be any rest in a wrong world, while the divine way of righteousness is disclosed before it. There is a disquieting condemnation in such a fact which cannot be muffled by any make-

believe reform. Never was my faith more settled in the fact of the genuineness of this leadership of our Lord than now. The way out of every wrong is his way. The way out of every sin is his way. The way out of every sorrow is his way.

Back of very much of the significant unrest of the world to-day is Jesus Christ. It is the unrest of leaven, and he is the leaven that has been stirred into a whole world. That startlingly interesting preacher of England, whose blunt directness in address and choice of language has been somewhat of a shock to many of his more formal brethren, Dr. Studdert Kennedy in one of his books has discussed in forceful manner the disquieting result of Jesus in an unideal world, and declares that it is because he has gotten so firm a hold of us that we are no longer as "snugly complacent as we were." The divine pressure of his presence is forcing a modification of life everywhere. Every wrong thing, no matter how deeply intrenched, nor how brazenly confident by long toleration it may have become, is destined to feel this conflict.

Oh that I knew how to take my place before this world-eloquent fact in this our rich, sinful, needy hour, and get the message of Christ to it. Jesus Christ is what our humanity must find. I believe the supreme moment for the Church of Christ thus far in its story is disclosed before us

in the fact that this modern society of ours has come on blundering through enough to be ready for conviction. Neither wealth nor science nor culture can minister to humanity as it needs ministry. That fact is no longer individual, but has become social. The great pity of our age will be that we who call ourselves Christian shall fail in response to the expected opportunity so crucial a fact presents to us.

I read when it first appeared that disturbing book, *The Rising Tide of Color*. I did not like it, but it made me think, and I went back to read it again and placed it in the shelves of my library quite because I did not like it. There are attitudes in it I do not agree with at all, but it does make all humanity arise before my mind. He who loves Jesus Christ and believes in his mission cannot have a whole world's population thrust into his attention as a problematic situation without arising in his conviction as to what there is to say to the situation. Yellow, brown, black, red folks do not all arise before me as a menace because they may threaten to swallow up the white race of which I am a poor representative. They the rather present to me, a Christian white man, the challenge of great races to whom Jesus Christ has just as real and just as divine a meaning as he has to my race. If the crisis of civilization is to be found in the liability of racial conflict, and is to be based upon number

and geography and genius and education, then I am compelled to believe it is our highest duty to help set before all mankind Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of man, Saviour of the world.

It is always a fascinating study to trace the eloquent lives in the philosophy of history that mark across the centuries the influence that has been attendant there. There is to-day a determined effort to shake off the religious imprint and to justify an evolutionary working of human character that will in some way account for much we have heretofore accorded to religion. There is a persistent and proud effort to explain the improvement of man, by man alone. I would launch this Christian faith of ours squarely into that attitude. Christ is the path! That is Christianity's challenge. Our faith is not a mere system of doctrine. It is not a mere philosophical formula professing to be a key to unlock some better feeling among men. Christianity is a great personal force and leadership. That personal force is the personal way in the personal fact of Jesus Christ. The sorrow of the world is not because it is poor, nor because it is ignorant. It sorrows because it is evil. When a soul's conscience is in bitterness you cannot bring it relief by submitting to it a perfect table of logarithms, nor by demonstrating the chemical formula of a tear-drop. Jesus Christ is absolutely essential to this age at this moment. May God

help every one of us to do all in our power to help bring this day of ours to the Christ way.

2. My second declaration is, Christ's death is the price. This is no cheap faith of ours. Its every step is costly. Its appeal is founded in the doctrine of self renunciation, and that doctrine has become its very life. The conclusion of our faith hath been written in the reddest blood of sacrifice that ever has been poured across this world. Its inauguration was made in the blood of God. This is no cheap faith of ours. He who expects to follow in its way cannot walk cheaply. You cannot go one step with Jesus Christ without sensing this great fact.

I do not mean thus to talk in any terms of sacrifice that can be paid by whatever coinage that may afford an easy way out. I would not seem to put such blood-red meaning as this within reach of the measure that can be made in silver and gold. All that may be the very cheapest sort of a program we could write. God is not deceived. Maybe we have been trying to write our sacrifice of late too much in terms of silver and gold. The very fullest cost of such matters may be paid by some poor wearied widow who may come tremblingly to drop even among the golden gifts of the treasury the copper—all she had—to ring forever down the halls of God's treasury here. I am saying that the price of which I speak is not to be defined by silver and gold. It can be writ-

ten only in the things which go to make life red in its meaning. The very opening chapter of this great story among us had to be encrimsoned with the indelible blood of our Lord; and whenever I turn my solicitous attention along the way he came, to find out how I too may walk, I find myself conscripted to the very last strength I possess. Christianity challenges us with everything that sacrifice can mean. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, in that he laid down his life for us, and we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren." There is heroism in Christianity. Its whole story is wrought out in service ever attendant with sacrifice; and sometime, though we come staggering along through blood; sometime, though we be clad in the plainest garments of self-denial; sometime, though our hearts be wearied with seemingly more than we can bear; sometime we shall drink of the cup from which our Saviour drank and be baptized with the baptism with which he was baptized, and bear in our bodies the marks of his sufferings. Sometime the price of it all will burn and blaze as the credential of it all, and we shall realize that everything cost may mean shall have its new and ultimate interpretation in the fellowship of that suffering which will go along with us, and write victory, and all that life achievement can mean, in its highest measure, in the life we ourselves have thus been able to live in Him.

How immeasurably we should prize a faith that has been secured by such sacrifice as the death of our Lord Christ! How we who profess that faith should blaze with enthusiasm in its propagation! It has been so, all down the years of the great story of the church, that those who have lifted it high; those whose lives have set it victoriously in the fields of human influence; those who have incarnated it in its best living service have been those who, regardless of cost, and regardless of personal welfare, have buried all selfishness in the depths of true devotion.

3. In closing this sermon, allow me to mark the third essential fact as "the proof," the resurrection of our Lord. Now, see what we have as printed on the card handed me somewhere by someone—the path, the price, the proof.

The credential of our faith is the resurrection of our Lord. "If Christ be not risen, then is . . . our faith . . . vain." We would not qualify the issue there. We do not come up to the resurrection as an offered alternative. Our enemies have not caught us in a dilemma and dragged us up to the grave of our Lord, and there compelled us to defend ourselves. The rather do we make this our stand. We fly to that empty grave for defense and find our defense becoming defiance. We challenge all unbelief with the empty grave. We freely stake our cause there.

All that had been necessary to destroy Christianity utterly, in a day when its enemies were eagerly seeking for every available means of destroying it, would have been to bring the dead body of its Lord. Men do not build great crusading faiths upon the dead bodies of their leaders. The dead body of Jesus had been placed in a stone tomb, sealed and guarded by soldiers. They were insuring it against fraud. They did not intend that a troublous religion should find its stronghold in some trick. The disciples were not only discouraged and heartbroken at the collapse of the hopes they had built up and cherished with a desperation, that somehow their Lord would with divine hand smite his enemies before him; they were scared also that they might fall under the mad condemnation that had crucified him. They had run for hiding. They knew Christ was dead. They had seen the pale, pierced body hanging limp to the cruel nails. They had seen the streaming side where the piercing spear had struck him.

Can anyone possibly conceive that such a company of frightened, shrinking, uninfluential, despised men as were they could ever have been built back into a bold, defiant, singing, preaching group of believers by a deception that was built around the secret possession of a dead body? The priests tried to bribe some of the soldiers to say his disciples had stolen the body.

Can anyone dream a scheme of propagation that would lead those who proclaimed it straight into persecution, and would lead frequently to the worst forms of death, and all founded upon a deception which was cherished by the possession of a dead body, for which all their lying was done? There must be something more substantial upon which to found the facts which are familiar now in world history. The Christian Church must be accounted for. Had those hating priests and those embarrassed soldiers and the chagrined sanhedrin and the troubled men in authority proposed to stop all the bold preaching of the new faith which was shaking the established hierarchy, and setting a new route for the stream of history, all they had needed to do was to produce the dead body of this Jesus whom they had seen die on Calvary, and whose pale body they had officially sealed in Joseph's tomb. Bring the body! Bring the body!

Instead of that easy triumph of the then strong enemy we witness a strange hush settling across the clamoring mob that killed him. We mark the utter silence of the courts that had dared condemn him. We note the cowardly absence of the soldiers who had stood guard to watch him die, and in light mockery had cast lots at the foot of the cross for his simple garment. We, however, must recognize something more positive than these negative evidences. Back from

the fear-sought shadows of hiding, and back from the fear-driven stampede of their troubled faith, came those men and women who had been with him. They had a new song. They brought a bold story. They witnessed a new presence. They were challenging with defiant conviction. They preached without apology. They sought opportunity to declare their experiences. They shrank not from any sacrifice their recovered faith might require. Many of them counted not their lives too dear to surrender for their faith. Instead of offering some weak explanation to cover a mystery they challenged every doubt with their own experience. "If Christ be not risen, then is our . . . faith . . . vain." And across all the ages that alternative is written. We believe in the resurrection of our Lord. We have not been called upon to clear it of mystery, nor to make it conform to what men may call reasonable. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

To every soul everywhere we appeal with our faith. We await the universal victory of the great truth. Let all of us who own him sovereign Lord give ourselves perfectly to his service, and submitting all our liberty to his sovereignty, spend life completely for his sake.

IV

DIVINE DISOBEDIENCE REWARDED

"And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."
—*Genesis 32. 26.*

DISOBEDIENCE is not, in our ordinary way of thinking, connected with profit. There is a sense of blame that seems to rest upon the fact of disobedience. It wins punishment ordinarily. It is a banner for revolution. We gain not by it; we expect to suffer for it. In corrective meditation about it we try to frame a conduct that may be an apparent excuse, as the main defense for disobedience. Disobedience is not in good repute. It has so long assumed its negative position on things that are right and high and noble that to approach it from any other side seems almost presumptuous. And yet, in the experience of every one of us, there have come times of heroic conduct when we have been compelled to feel a resistance to a demand which has placed disobedience as a bravery against some ignoble command that had been given. When temptation has assumed the proportion of command, we have been at our very best when, in firm disobedience to every evil lure, we have breasted our way even unto right-

eousness. There, after genuine endeavor, we have straightened ourselves to receive congratulations upon our brave disobedience, and were made aware that, after all, it was rather a higher obedience that had prompted us. While we disobeyed evil we obeyed the good, and that in the final summary is life's finest obedience. Both obedience and disobedience are wrapped up in either.

Divine disobedience rewarded, however, is a phrase which dares couple into disobedience a word which at once must flavor the attitude with blame. When I go against a divine command, it will be a hard case for me to plead a higher obedience. When I pluck up courage to stand against the tyranny of some evil command, I can feel a pride of approving conscience. When my disobedience, however, shall find itself rated for position up against a divine command, it is at least unusual to find it declaring a dividend.

This whole strange but fascinating incident, from which I have taken our text, should be read here just as it is recorded in the Bible.

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee

go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name! And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved" (Gen. 32. 24-30).

Such is the derivative of the strange sounding theme I have announced, the basis of a reward in holy disobedience. This was the birthplace of Jacob's best life. From this struggling, disobedient night he is to be Israel, a prince of God.

Jacob's life is one of those strange lives of contrariety where character stands out in contradictory terms. You cannot make rules of conduct for such as is he. Our criticism of him is always ready and easily offered. We seem to know him. He may be a strange mixture, but he is not mysterious. We understand him. We do not seek to excuse him, but we are not surprised. He is a familiar figure. In one of my early charges I had a unique Irish class-leader. He had never had an excess of schooling, but so genuine was he in his native elements that, like a bit of flint, you would always get a flash when you struck him. One night in a little service we

were holding the subject of our study was Jacob. In the midst of a rather dull session, every other fact of which has long since faded from my memory, Dennis suddenly struck this sentence which has glowed in my memory ever since and will: "I thank God for Jacob. I thank God for Jacob because I have always believed that if God could save Jacob, he could save me too." There is a strange helpfulness in this unusual character. He does doubtless deserve criticism. Any one of us about whom as much of the secret motives of life could be revealed as have been about Jacob would find a like liability. The only comfort we can derive from the avalanche of bad things our newspapers daily seem to gloat over, as they headline the hideous findings their reporters have made, is the doubtful comfort we feel in the things we know they do not know.

Jacob, in spite of all the things we do not like, still holds a genuine interest. There is about him something so real, that criticism cannot destroy. Were he a mere little fellow, of selfish design and ambitious plottings, he would have long since faded from the pages of the world's interest. His actual value outlives all his failings. His flaws still leave his genuine treasure cherished. When they found the great Cullilan diamond it was a big rough chunk of crystal the size of your fist. But it was flawed. They brought the most skillful diamond workers they

could find and assigned to them the task of recovering all the value that could be retained in that great, beautiful, flawed crystal. They split it apart right through the flaw. The crystaled wonder was greater than its flaws.

Jacob is always greater than his faults. He does not falter across the ages. He comes on down the centuries. I like the study of a strong man, even if he does disappoint me at times by making havoc of his strength. He is more profitable than a weak man, even so. I like a man who has so many genuine elements of strength in him that if he does go wrong he will cause a shudder to run all along the race. A weak man I can only pity.

Esau and Laban, close bound to Jacob's story, seem but to reveal his contrast. A strong man is always reflected by those lesser men who group about him. Esau was a stumbling, faltering fellow, who, I believe, honestly thought there was not very much in religion and that those who gave themselves to it were easily influenced. Laban believed in a somewhat opposite direction, but with an equal unsoundness, that he could by a carefully laid plan make profit for his own purse out of the professed convictions of those to whom religion became a motive.

Jacob, unfairly used by Laban, ran away for his own relief, only to discover that his escape from his grasping father-in-law had delivered

him into the presence of Esau, who really carried a claim Jacob could not dodge. Jacob dreaded to see Esau. His dread of Esau was not so much his dread of Esau as it was his dread of looking himself squarely in the eyes. There is often a strange reason for our evasion of some folks to be found in the fact that we see ourselves in their presence more clearly than we see them. Esau was a mirror to Jacob. Did you ever stop to think that no one ever actually saw his or her own face? All we have ever seen has been the reflection of our faces from some medium. Homely folks hate a mirror. It is not the mirror's fault.

Up to the time of our text Jacob had been a man of men. He had concerned himself with constant attention to that graded position. Until a man of men and a man of God shall be identical, the character which seeks one to the carelessness of the other shall find neither. Jacob was proud of his strength. To stand well among men this rugged fact of sheer strength had held his confidence. But at the conclusion of this revolutionary incident, out of which I take our text verse, through and beyond everything he was or ever had been, it is written here he became a prince and had power with God and men and prevailed. In the strange way of the arrival of that power of prevailing I am interested now.

I am compelled to admire any man who will lay hold on God, even in defiance by faith, and

will refuse to let go until he shall have answer to his prayer, and who shall even by that exalted disobedience, which springs from faith, wring his reward from his antagonism. I would that some such heroic measure of faith might once more come upon our endeavors. We lack a faith that will test itself even unto seeming disobedience, a disobedience which is born of a desperation of our faith. We quit too soon. Our faith so often wearies and gives up just where faith really begins. We simply must not stop short of prevailing, if we are to prove ourselves genuine believers in a prevailing God.

This prevailing fact of Jacob, which lives over beyond his high refusal to release his antagonist, carries to me very great helpfulness in spiritual things. We conquer when we are conquered. How unlike the judgments of other realms of endeavor that sounds, yet "spiritual things are spiritually discerned." We do actually overcome, even at the time and in the way it oft seems we have been overcome. Anyone can overcome in victory. But it is the child of God alone who overcomes in the hot fires that roar in the furnace of defeat. Losses themselves have very frequently become the richest gains. "Cast down but not forsaken," is one of the rich phrases strung by inspiration across the pages of the Bible. The very things which have seemed sure ruin have been built into victorious reward.

"Therefore," says Paul; and he came up to the declaration of that great "therefore" through an experience that makes it one of the most deathlessly glowing words ever left among us; a "therefore" which wears all the concentrate glory of almost everything hard to even endure, not to say overcome: "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

The inferred fact as growing from this strange disobedience and yet profitable conduct, for which I seek emphasis now is, that we may find our genuine profit in simply clinging to our faith. Jacob was learning a new fact in his theretofore independent career. He had always been a bold, dictating character. He decided upon his own course and pursued it. His own strategy and daring and genius and strength had made him a prosperous man. His experience thus had built up in him such a confidence in himself that he would even dare to wrestle with God. He would struggle the whole night through. He had never been defeated. Years of strange victories in which he cherished a proud confidence were behind him. He was now engaged in a bold effort to work his way out of the worst wrong of his whole life. He arranged a rich present to be given his wronged brother Esau, who was coming to meet him. A present was set forward

such as Esau could not refuse—riches, great riches.

A great train of cattle and sheep and goats and servants went forward to meet the long-hating brother. Jacob remained far behind, and alone. He was desirous of making his appearance at the strategic moment after the very rich present had produced a proper entrance for him. Believing everything had been accomplished, and forgetting that his own personal preparation was the most necessary preparation of all, he arose and made ready to go forward.

It was well all this happened beside the brook Jabbok. The name of that little tossing, tumultuous stream means "a struggle." Had it not already been so named Jacob would doubtless have renamed it that night. I fancy the much troubled man said as he came forward to the edge of the little stream, and with much misgiving in his heart, "Jabbok—Jacob. Both are names of trouble. Struggle, struggle, so I am to enter this land before me." And just as his old and thus far victorious nature made ready to enter again upon a conquest in false confidence, he was suddenly seized by a great, strong hand in the thick darkness. I imagine at the first impress of that arresting hand he thought, "Esau!"

There was now, however, much more at stake than the mere settling of a very bad and long-standing family trouble. Had Jacob crossed

Jabbok that night unhindered and completed the offered price he had put out for peace, he would have still been Jacob the shrewd trader, Jacob the schemer, Jacob the victor. But Jacob had now reached his limit as Jacob. He must be changed. Until that moment he had never calculated any indebtedness to God. What he had, he had won. He was not a recipient. He had made his own way. He was sufficient unto himself. He asked no help.

"And Jacob was left alone," is the keen way the inspired pen has written it in the Book. Searching phrase that. It is essential. There are times when that is the only thing that can be done. Whenever a man is sure of himself, it is good to leave him absolutely alone that he may clearly see in what little strength he has grounded his confidence. To make us men and women we at times must be deserted to ourselves. Men of Jacob's nature must be made to realize that everything is on beyond Jabbok, and that they are detained by a strong hand in the darkness. Drive the herds and flocks on ahead. Send on all the servants. Get everything and everybody out of the way now, for Jacob must be left alone; God wants to meet Jacob. Many, many there are indeed to-day who can arise to testify that they never really did have God's hand close in theirs until they clasped it in the darkness, and all alone.

This is Jacob's hardest fight. Self-confidence must go out if religious experience is to come in. Jacob was about to break into the higher spheres of life with his trading, scheming methods, which had won so easily in other things. It was as though thus he might by some bargain be able to buy his religious way. This is about as up-to-date a scene as could be found for this proud day of ours along the whole calendar.

The religious life and all its many stirring challenges is always a mystery to Jacob as long as he believes himself able to wrestle all alone. "And they wrestled all night." It is an interesting detail set in here where nothing could be granted space that was meaningless, it is an interesting detail that it says "just at dawn" the angel touched the big strong thigh of the wrestling man and threw it out. The thigh is the wrestler's strength. If his thigh fails, his wrestling cannot continue. This self-sufficient man had to feel his very ability to stand struck from under him. The only thing, then, that the strong man could do was to cling to his opponent. Self-confidence goes down in the man who cannot stand alone. The whole nature of Jacob goes down there. At that moment he ceases struggling and prays.

Still gleams his purpose. His persistent self-confidence now becomes the very boldness of his faith. Even his prayer of dependence is tuned to

a fine persistence. This is the rich spiritual fact I have dared write in such closely liable terms as a rewarded disobedience. The defeated man holds on. His divine contestant calls, "Let me go!" Less hands than Jacob's would have been slackened and released the very reward he needed. Defeated beyond all hope of recovery, he knew he had no chance as a wrestler. "Let me go," says the angel. And, tightening his determined grip, he cried out as he saw the only way yet open, and, in fact, the only way ever open for victory in the spiritual world, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me."

All he could do was to hold on. In that very fact is to be found the very heart of the finest philosophy of all our religious experience. One place it has been written by the psalmist in impressive phrase thus, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." There stands Daniel with the same determination, "I will not defile myself with the king's meat." There is great triumphant Job, shouting in his clinging trust, at all his false counselors and out of the thickest darkness suffering could drape, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." There goes Abraham on that perhaps most painful pilgrimage any man ever stumbled through. Toiling heavy-hearted up a mocking mountainside all a worn day. His wondering and much-beloved son toil-

ing along in the unconsciousness of it all, which alone made it possible for him to go, the consciousness of it all, however, making of every step of the father's way a religious boldness unequaled by any other. The same fact comes, of course, to its supreme exposition in the way of our Lord himself, because he could write it in the divine plus of himself that much beyond any human effort. In the garden alone. What a place to find God! The disciples worn to sleep by anxiety. "And he went a litle farther," is the infinitely meaningful phase set amid the story. It was out there in that separated place to which he went, as well described toward us as "a little farther," as though some man with a measure rod had tried with breaking figures to tell us how far it was, for it was divinely away, out there all alone he met the Father. "Not my will but thine be done," was the key of that meeting.

By such illustrative scenes thus as I have indicated along the story I have been saying that Jacob found company with the noblest of all the earth, and in their noblest moments, when he clung that hard night at Jabbok to the angel.

Let us learn to cling to God. Cling to him in self-surrender. It is the sure highway of victory. There will be sure to come in each of our lives situations in which there is nothing else that can be done, if we are to keep our faith, but

to simply cling to God. Worn out with the struggle we can still find the reward of this high disobedience Jacob tried. We can refuse to give up. We can cling so long as God stands.

There is such a thing as what I will call a prevailing presumption. I threw a club at a dog once. Poor old dog! I thought to drive him away. That dog gave me one of the presumptive surprises of my life. He grabbed that club up in his mouth and in a great confident gladness came bounding up to me and, dropping the club at my feet, looked up victoriously and made ready for another throw. I could have cried. In fact, I suppose I did. That old dog had beaten me with my own club. I patted him on the head, and of one thing I am sure, I never threw any more clubs at that particular dog anyhow. He conquered me by putting confidence in me.

God does not resist confidence. No trustful heart will be spurned. He were not God if he could cast a soul away that would implicitly rely on him.

So Jacob won at Jabbok. Here is the strange verse written in interpretation of this human victory over the divine, "When he saw that he prevailed not against" Jacob. That is the genius of the real meaning in the strange theme with which I have titled this sermon. Jacob wins, but it is not a victory of his prowess. The consciousness of his own strength is broken. The

power that had made him proud has gone down. He has passed from wrestling to prayer, and sobs out in the breakdown of a strong man, but in the unfailing persistence of a trusting man, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Clinging helplessly Jacob supplicates the blessing he could not compel.

The man who crossed Jabbok that new morning was not Jacob. He was given the new prevailing name of Israel, a Prince of God. He became a man who discovered by all the eloquence of experience that the real way to get a great gift from God is to ask for it, not to demand it. God is pleased thus to suffer himself to be overcome. We can prevail, because our God has bound himself to us by promise. Self-confidence must always be broken before religious life can prosper. Jacob could well afford to lose even his most prized thigh as a wrestler, if he could in exchange gain the victory of clinging to God. He may never again go with the old strong step. He was destined to limp his way along all his remaining days. But he had gained that convinced decision, which, even with a halting step, yet knows better what ground it walks and by what right it walks there. Israel, be not ashamed of that limping step of yours. It is God's signature. May God forbid that any of us shall ever misunderstand such a divine touch, and instead of accepting it as the way of our new vic-

torious life, shall with it lie prostrate and despairing in the darkness. God grant the victory of Israel to us all. Impossible to defeat. Breathing victory everywhere. Standing calmly upon the promises of God.

Communication Cemetery
Have you ever known anyone really dead for a few minutes who came back to life + told what happened? — ate

V

SEEING THE UNSEEN

"We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen."—*2 Corinthians 4. 18.*

WHEN my beloved father came calmly up to die, he summoned his last remaining strength to lift his wearied head from the pillow and said, as his mortal eyes, which had not well served his peering soul for some time, faded away, "The vision! The vision!" His soul could outsee his eyes. His faculty of vision was superior to his instrument of vision.

That is a human fact which not only finds its demonstration when death dims these none too good eyes of ours, but which frequently breaks upon our consciousness in the earnestness with which we strain our denied vision into the unpierced darkness about us. We strain our eyes in an endeavor to see when the natural night is dark. When we walk in the darkness, and know no light will break before us, we do not shut our eyes, we peer sightlessly into the blackness. Often I have come in out of the darkness with tired eyes. Not tired from seeing, but tired from looking.

A blind man is blind not because he could not

as a man see had he but eyes with which to see. The pathos of that blind man is that to him all the genuine glories of vision are possible, and he could doubtless be enraptured by many of the beauties which are all about, but he has nothing by which those glories can be brought to him. Homer was blind. We say that because his natural eyes were sightless. What such a soul as was he could have seen, had he been able to have the light of the world brought to him, we can only guess. He was a seer, but he had no eyes, and we call him blind.

Our faculty of vision and our instrument of vision are two very distinctly different matters about us. Our word "blind" is a handicap word of mortal measure, and may not mean so very ultimately much after all. Just because what my optician calls my optic nerve is not able to function on my brain is not conclusive reason that I may be stone blind. Saul of Tarsus never had seen so far, nor half so keenly, in all his life before, as he did that light-flooded day when he was stricken with blindness in the dust before Damascus.

We do not see very much at our best. When the scientist begins to talk to me about the range of my vision as compared to the available range for his experiments I am ashamed of my eyes and wonder what the genuine scientists may some mortality-free day be able to behold in the

long reaches of radiation which stretch away from my feeble eyes here, and out into which I can feel my dark way along with instruments I can make which are more sensitive by far than my eyes. One of my friends, a great experimental chemist, brought me one day a most impressive chart prepared by the great scientist Steinmetz, one of the world's recognized geniuses whom America gained through the door of immigration. My friend has called this interesting chart The Keyboard of God's Organ, and upon it are spread sixty octaves. In all these many octaves the scientists have been experimenting and registering interesting results. Wireless telegraph waves, Hertzian waves, ultra-red rays, visible rays, ultra-violet rays, X-rays; across sixty impressive octaves of experimental possibilities this great record stands. The thing that interested me, however, more than any of the confounding mysteries, amid which the eager scientists are constantly in research, was the fact that in but one of those sixty octaves could there be made any impression upon my poor eyes. I call myself a seeing man, yet in all fifty-nine of the remaining octaves of radial activity I can see nothing. Just how high an average must I pass in this seeing test in order to grade as a seeing man? The fact is that all mortality is fifty-nine-sixtieths blind, even with the keenest eyes and in the little sum of to-day's knowledge. Such facts

make me impatient with mortality, scant functioning that it is, in which I am imprisoned here. All around me reality I cannot see. Sounds I cannot hear, as well as sights I cannot behold. Years ago I was reading somewhere in one of Helmholtz' books and met a sentence that has lingered in my memory. He said that if he went to a store and purchased an instrument which proved to be as imperfect as the human eye, he would take it back and demand the return of his money. When I read that sentence I did not understand just what he meant. I am certain now his mind was running along this same line of our limited vision.

A number of years ago I chanced upon a little poem tucked in the columns of *The Independent,* and written by John B. Tabb. The pathetic yet hopeful lines made such an impress upon my attention and set themselves so persistently into my meditation that they have made for themselves a place in my whole mental interpretation of life. The author had but recently lost his sight, and settling back into the darkness with the memory of the light he once had known, he wrote his feelings thus:

"Back to the primal gloom
Where life began;
As to my mother's womb
Must I, a man,
Return:

Not to be born again,
But to remain;
And in the School of Darkness learn,
What mean
The things unseen."

To get my vision focused on the things unseen I have wondered how necessary it is for me to lose my sight of the things I ordinarily call the seen. Recently there was printed all across our country in columns of the daily press the impressive account of an honor student in one of our Western universities who, having finished her education with high honors, was informed that she would soon become blind, and there was no hope, by any known process, to preserve her sight. Without telling her friends or relatives of her affliction, she secured a traveling companion and at once they started on a tour of Europe to store her mind and impress upon her determined memory all the beautiful things she could see. She went seeing for future interest. Pictures and statuary and architecture and landscapes, ocean, sky and mountains were feasted upon by her aroused but doomed eyes. There was something deeply pathetic to me in that young lady's eager determination that made me wonder if those of us who are blessed with good ordinary vision have a fair appreciation of what it means to see the seeable in a world like this. As I thought of the blindness coming upon her eager

lookings I remembered that you cannot see out of the light into the darkness, but that you can see easily out of the darkness into the light.

Seeing things not seen! That interests me. I confess to just a bit of weariness at the bold assumption of many of the things that are seen. Maybe they assume too much importance. We are under the sway of the seen. Exhibits! Exhibits! Get a catalogue at the door and follow the numbers carefully to make sure you know what you are looking at. Somewhere in one of John Ruskin's books I remember he tells of seeing an exhibit as Number 10, "Dog done in black marble." The description impressed the great critic as an insult to either the artist or the onlooker, whichever way it might be interpreted. As if one might not know it was a dog, or might be color blind. Look! Look! Look! A day of seeing, this. Lights turned on all night so no show-window or billboard can fail to make exhibit. See! See! See! Hats, shoes, neckties, hammers, hatchets, hack saws, pins, buttons, ribbons, salted peanuts, gum drops, false teeth and glass eyes. Look! Look! We are flanked on all sides by things to be looked at. Just as soon as a thing is set up to be seen it is done in a manner unusual or we would not look. I saw a crowd looking in at a show window. I took my eyes over there to look around also. There was a chassis of an automobile done in a heavy gold-plate fin-

ish. It was the unusual dress on the machine that caught the gaze. Hundreds of machines just like the one in the window were running down the streets on all sides of us, and we were not even noticing them. We are gazers. Looking at the seen. That is commonplace.

This text seems to such a world as we have now as welcome as an inviting seat in a cool shade after we have been pushed and jostled about in some place of exhibition. Turn in here, away from the curious, gazing, eye-straining, spectacled crowd, and behold the things not seen.

A woman brought me one day, from a secretly keyed box she cherished, a selection of things she greatly prized. The vulgar gaze of the ordinary familiarity was never allowed to be turned upon these carefully kept treasures. They were little things by ordinary measure. The market of the world had no quotations upon them. Even the old junk dealer would not have made a bid for them. He could pick up old dirty rags down almost any alley of more value on his quotation list than these things this tender, affectionate woman brought out to show me. A thief would have passed them all by had he raided that house. There was no intrinsic value, as economists measure intrinsic, in all she brought me in hands that prized them beyond price. She kept them locked in a strong box, and only when some strange appreciation was

moved in her deepest soul did she ever open that box. It was not the way they looked, but what they meant to her that fastened that value there. It was the unseen she was looking at. A little crumpled shoe. A bit of a ribbon. A curl of golden hair. An old worn ring.

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." Come now aside here in this quiet, helpful association and get this real vision. This world of ours is tired. Business is exacting. Our whole generation is run to exhaustion after things it can see and hold. The text sounds like a mistake. I wonder if the printer did not get the wrong word here. Printers do make strange mistakes. Proof-readers do pass some very glaring errors. I wonder if Paul's proof-readers have failed him. Let us now look at the things that are seen! That sounds solid. That is practical talk. This is a practical age. "Look at the things that are seen." That sounds ordinary. So it does. But it dies also in its own dull ordinariness. That is one of the very marked troubles with all this ordinary practical talk we hear so much of. So ordinary. Just ordinary. I am impatient at the ordinary. Paul made no mistake here. His printer has printed him correctly. He speaks here in an extraordinary manner. He is saying a big, unusual and true thing. I had long avoided this text because it sounded strange and over-

drawn. To my way of thinking now the very bold unusual in the text is its best credential. It is not difficult. It is plainly honest. Life at its very best is made up of looking at the unseen and handling the untouchable. Paul deals here with real fundamentals. The coarser, cruder things of life are so very often our masters. Property, money, farms, mountains, I see you! Paul was associating with folks who were trying with brick and mortar to build the eternal into their works. Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, Jerusalem. They had great temples of stone intended to remain. There stood Rome, proudly placed on her seven hills and proclaimed "The Eternal City." Arch of Triumph—Hadrian—Cæsar—This is Rome! But pointing above and away from all this built-up confidence in stone, the great preacher said: "See the unseen! The things which are seen are temporal. The things which are not seen are eternal." And to-day, a few centuries after those confident Romans thought they had built them an eternal city out of stone and brick, a world goes sight-seeing to stand amid the tumbled glory all along the Appian Way, and amid the strewn Forum, there to learn impressively the meaning of Paul in this text that wearies not with the ages. Eternal things are unseen when we talk in terms of mortal eyes. To get our conversation put in best terms we must cut the tether of the mortal. Must

I think my beloved father is any less real to me now than he was eight years ago when we tenderly laid his worn-out mortality on a sun-swept Kansas hilltop? All that could be seen of him we buried there, but the unseen and the eternal of him is all mine still. I am only seeking phrase and figure now to get said this significant fact, that eternity is not stamped on earth or sea or sky. Their very physical incorporation marks them temporary. They are passing away—"Farewell, mortality" is a phrase we sing in truth—

> "Perishing things of clay,
> Born but for one brief day,
> Pass from my heart away."

Thus we raise our defiant song correctly. The things that remain are spiritual, and one day God will have done with his purpose in the temporal. It is not disapproval, it is only going on. We will cut the shore-line of the visible, and launch away into the invisible. He has promised to guide us with his eye.

All this spiritualistic mockery, whereby so-called mediums are endeavoring to bring back departed loved ones, to tether them once more in this seen-and-heard realm of our little mortality, breaks down in its own folly. I thank no one for even profaning the great silent dignity of the eternal with the little pottering things

of the temporal; to trouble the eternal with rapping on tables, or writing on slates, or blowing brass trumpets, or any of the other coarse, cheap things they would dignify by calling proofs. I thank God profoundly for a Christian faith that can stand calmly with its face in the dark, and having not seen, believe. After all, the very best and the greatest and the most genuinely real things of our lives are unseen. Life, hope, faith, aspiration—how real they are!

What is hope? The other day I came down the walk beside my church, and a man stood studying the meaning of a statue standing there. As I stopped beside him, he said, "What does that word 'yet' mean there?" I told him what had suggested the statue, and how we were trying there with the medium of the seeable to direct a higher vision into the realm of the unseen. He caught my arm and said, "I figured that out." He then told me a life story that fairly throbbed with tragedy, with genuine heartbreak, with a broken home, with false friends, with betrayed love. Then as he turned to leave me rather abruptly, as in the sway of a tremendous impulse, he looked again at the struggling figure of hope and said, "He is coming through though, isn't he?" And he was gone. What is hope?

What is love? I cannot just answer. My dictionary helps me little. My psychology helps me

no more. I have never seen it. I have seen people impelled by it. But it acts without logic. Tender and kind sometimes it is shown. Furious as a storm I have known it roused. Love is most surely real.

What is conscience? Surely not one among us can doubt its reality, but that is just about as far as we can go in description. We have seen cowards it has made, but it was concealed. We have ourselves felt the stinging cuts of its sharp whips. It pushes folks into strange conduct. It collects long overdue debts. It steals sleep from tired eyes. It compels chagrining confessions—

"My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain."

But I never saw conscience; and the very language of such a statement seems so mixed in its terminology as to cause a smile of disapproval at its suggestion.

The genuine fact of all our lives is that about all the real things of life are the hidden and unseen things. I saw a glass engine once. It was an interesting exhibit. Its pistons plunged back and forth in transparent cylinders, yet I could not see the hidden hands of the geni who toiled there. I could see turning wheels, and hear the puff of the exhaust as the steam became

visible as mist as it came in contact with the air. But the actual power that pushed at those pistons there I could not see. I rubbed my eyes at their blindness.

The power of electricity I cannot see. When you break its current or interfere with its smooth flow it flames and flares and crackles and hisses. But the power is invisible as it flows through the wire and changes the wire in no manner.

All this is but symbolic of life. The men through whom have poured these great invisible currents have crystallized history. The man of faith has been the man who has precipitated into the visible world the things we treasure. He has thought out the secrets. He has made the sacrifice. He has gone his conquering way and left behind him roads and bridges and houses and temples and books and tools. But he was ever on ahead, hearing the unspoken, seeing the unseen, careering with the unknown. That is a good and a well-prized story of Richard Cœur de Lion, captured and imprisoned in a secret dungeon in an old castle after the great Crusade. Blandel, his favorite musician, went about as a traveling minstrel in determined pilgrimage to every castle gate, playing persistently there the king's favorite strains. At last, one dreary day, the sobbing strains of the instrument without were answered by the imprisoned king in the dungeon. Once more thus the king was found

and his throne regained. He had heard the lucid melodies of the unseen musician. Whether or no the famous story of the Lion Heart be true, I do know the lure of the unseen has been a saving fact among men. I have seen a man, or the wreck of a man, broken, and bruised and discouraged, abandoned by those he had loved, and written off their memory, make a strange new life among men. There came into his vision one black night the glory of the invisible. It lured his halting feet. It painted new ideals before him. It glowed with hope. He struggled to his feet. The chain of habit was snapped. A light streamed down from an unseen somewhere, and to-day that man is a victor among us. No longer is he a despised "drunken bum," but for long now he is a man of God and a noble minister of life and service. He caught the vision of the unseen.

The practical man arises now to make objection that all this theoretic talk and intangible suggestion does not work in this brick-and-mortar sort of a day in which we live. We are not just now concerned with the invisible; we are having eye trouble over things which are already within the range of our mortal eyes. But I will not change my preachment for this practical objector. There has been, and there is now, a tyranny in the hard-edged reality of this so-called visible world. It has broken a multitude under

its hard heel. I believe the very spirit of our text is most essential in the midst of this practical tyranny of to-day's materialism. I am not surprised at the crushed lives that glare at us from news columns. They are the natural fruit of our over-emphasized materialism. Human life is not hard to crush if you can but confine its interest to this world. Upon these rocks, these pavements, these fields, these factories, these banks concentrate men's lives if you will; and in so doing you emphasize the need of their emancipation from them all. There is absolutely no freedom, or rest, or refreshment for a hard-working man to go and sit with a company of men from his very same sort of a job and talk there all evening about the work of the day. What rest or relaxation for a bricklayer to come home at evening, wash the mortar off his hardened hands, and dig the brick dust out of his ears, and then go to a meeting of bricklayers where they talk of laying brick and study how to lay up a wall. He would really get on much better if he would join a crochet club of spinsters and talk of the past. What rest and relief for a banker to lock the vault with a smash of the steel bolts at night and drag himself off somewhere to spend the evening listening to eager conversation on the liable price of call-money, and hearing a long and very sound speech on frozen assets and the possibility of a panic.

What this old clod-bound world of ours needs is to be able to lift its eyes away from all this well-known mortality and look steadfastly at the unseen. Look at the eternal things. Fix eyes upon those things which emancipate us from material serfdom, and begin to be freedmen indeed.

We used to have a very fine expression which was common to hear used in religious discussions, and which would stand a gracious revival among us to-day. We talked of practicing the presence of God. I like it. It carries the expectation of a life very close to God. One day that mental machine named Matthew Arnold, a gentleman and scholar who wrote much good poetry and did a very great amount of speculative doubting of God, met a very real and a very different sort of a personality than was that he himself possessed. In the dirt and distress and utter wretchedness of an East London district Arnold met an old preacher who eagerly went his ministrant way. The poet inquired poetically:

"'Ill and overworked, how fare you in this scene?'
'Bravely!' said he, 'for of late I have been
Much cheered with thoughts of Christ the living bread.'"

The reply went deep down into the poet's soul, and he could not forget the genuine facts which,

without doubt, were ministering positively to that earnest man in the midst of things that in themselves would choke his very spirit. So the poet goes on with his own conclusion:

"Above the howling senses ebb and flow,
Not with lost pains thou laborest through the night,
Thou makest the heaven thou hopest indeed thy home."

After all, we are more certain of God than we are of this world. What could we do without the practical ministry of plain faith? How utterly unseen faith is, and yet how steadfastly it looketh at the reality which alone endures. Faith strangely guides us. Our very civilization is built upon it, even with what it boasts as practical. Faith makes life livable, and unseen though it be, it walks beside us evermore in the fine influence of reality. I am asking now that we may all balance our lives with a vision of this truth which will set abiding peace within.

This implied word of Paul has been fulfilled at Corinth whence it was sent. Their proud streets; their massive wonder-wrought temple; all the great seen glories they feasted their wonder-filled eyes upon, are vanished before the tempest of time. The palsy of the temporal shook them down. The wake of history is a ruck of debris. To-morrow men will come with pick and shovel and dig for the evidences of the proud

visibles of to-day. But the eternal invisibles of God go on forever. A human is great only as he catches the true vision of the unseen. A master principle in every branch of life, it is doubly significant in the Christian life. When great crushing sorrow comes and sweeps like a flood we see sorrow. When piling difficulty looms across our already hard pathway we realize its reality. When, without eyes set upon what the world has taught us to be a real vision, we look out for the encamping hosts all about us and in fear turn to ask, "Where, oh where, are the horses and the chariots of Israel?" they are there all right. Lord, open the dull eyes to see, for most truly the horsemen that are with us are more than those that are with the enemy. Lo, all about us the horses and the chariots of Israel!

We would stand calmly now, and striking hands with Paul across all the centuries, and through everything they may have brought to pass, declare in the full triumph of our experience: "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

We have eternity set in our hearts. In us are other powers than these mortal expressions we become so easily enamored of. The spaces of our souls are like the strange yet bountifully real

vision Ezekiel had when he saw great wheels turning which touched both the dust and the stars. God does not choose to report for confirmation at our little mortal senses. He does not choose to manifest himself in the tiny range of our mortal vision. But the vision of our faith, which sees as did Paul when stricken blind in the dust at Damascus; that accurate hearing ear which detected Him in the still small voice; that subtle something within us, our very best and highest self, declares in confidence, He is real. "We declare unto you the things we have seen, and our hands have handled out of the words of life." "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen."

VI

SEPARATED TO SERVE

"Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord."
—*Isaiah 52. 11.*

SEARCHING words are these Isaiah has written here, and they can never be erased from memory when once they strike their meaning to our attention. They meant no more to those to whom they were directly given than they do to me to-day. This is a deathless exhortation. God's church everywhere and always must hear it. The ages cannot tarnish such words.

The long struggle of the church with a world of sin, set in that world of sin to change it to a world of righteousness, has but increased the meaning of this heart-searching injunction, and should set it to-day before the earnest hearts of the whole Church of God on earth, as an appeal that could not be neglected.

The crisis before the church to-day is spiritual. There is, to be sure, a sense in which there never has been any other than a spiritual crisis before the church. If the church will but be spiritually what it should be, there will be no attendant failure in any of its story. That fact, however, is peculiarly meaningful to-day, because the church,

along with all other organizations, has found a luring sense of power and a confidence not difficult to understand reposing in other forms of strength. I incline to the belief we have become a bit too dependent upon the ordinary endowments, known also by other institutions among us, and which make no claim to any divine relationship, hence our whole influence in the world to-day is suffering from a comparative similarity. The church is not distinguishable as a divine institution, as it should be. We carry on our work in much the same way other institutions do. There should be attendant upon our influence and evident in our works the testimony of the fact that we are the Church of God.

Bishop Donaldson, of the Established Church in England, recently delivered a most earnest appeal to the church everywhere for a fellowship of prayer in a spiritual cry for a genuine revival of the religious life of the church. It was the result of a prayerful reaction of some earnest Christian people, as Christians toward world-conditions which are unchristian and which do most certainly challenge our whole claim as a Church of God on such an earth. Those praying people felt the grave challenge of a world of wrong. The halting progress of the great salvation against the power and dominion of unrighteousness is a trying fact to be compelled to face. The Fellowship of Prayer, which

has been the outgrowth of the appeal of Bishop Donaldson, arises from an honest endeavor to measure the church's obligation in the presence of the world-conditions immediately before us.

The Church of Jesus Christ has long made claim, and I am very sure does believe, that it is intrusted with the salvation of the world. In our Lord Jesus Christ we believe the whole world is not only to find its ideal, but likewise its power to attain that ideal. We have declared this fact so long, and the claim of our relationship to God has been so long before the world, that there has developed in it an expectancy that grows disappointment easily in every failure we make. There is to-day abroad in the world a critical interpretation of the church which has its roots set in this bold claim of ours. A few months ago our papers carried across this country a thrillingly tragic thing which happened in one of our eastern cities. A desperate father arose in the crazed interpretation of the grief at the death of his son, and killed the doctor he had called to cure him. How that awful thing struck and quivered in all our hearts! I could understand that desperate and overbalanced interpretation that grieved father had made. It was a most dreadful thing for him to do, but it was the interpretation of his expectation. It is at exactly that overstrained and far-reaching interpretation of a life that is not satisfactory, the Church of Christ, set in this

world with the announced mission to save it from sin and sorrow, finds itself, often now, the object of bitterest criticism.

The power of the church has always been found evidenced in the distinguishing type of life lived by the people of God, as controlled by spiritual motives and empowered by the evident presence of Him "whose we are and whom we serve." There must be a clear distinguishment in the lives we live. We are not called to conform to this world; we are, the rather, called to transform this world by the renewing of our lives here. Our question of conduct is never to be as to how we may be like unto those who have not named His name, but, rather, how we may distinguish that fact by contrasted motive in conduct.

Separated to serve is a word that runs all through the Book of God as a genuine mark of contrast. "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord," was put in the different phraseology of John, over in the New Testament in that searching Epistle in which he dwelt so plainly on the characteristic of Christian living, thus, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Again, near the very last of the last book in the Bible, he calls earnestly, "Come out of her [Babylon], my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

The contest of genuine holy living with the

life about it is a very old and an always severe contest. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor. 6. 17, 18; 7. 1.)

I attended recently one of the most heart-searching services of my whole life—an all-day council of preachers to consider the spiritual condition of our churches. We were honestly trying to throw the sounding-leads of our most careful observations, to discover, if possible, the reason for the lack of power which we believe the whole world notices in the church to-day. There was in no manner any endeavor to avoid any preacher-blame for the situation. I believe we were honestly seeking the cause, sparing not ourselves in any manner. There was not offered from that company one word of proud confidence seeking to make any others bear our own blame. We were much upon our knees in genuine searching prayer.

If the Church of Jesus Christ is to stir itself to the effectual accomplishment of the task to which it has been set, that company of earnest ministers honestly believe there must somehow

come some great infusion of genuine and evidently divine power into the whole church's life. I am sure I would seek no excuse for myself in the poor lean leadership my all too little life has been able to offer. I would, the rather, beg forgiveness, and pray earnestly, as I am sure I do try to pray, for an enduement of the characteristic element of real spiritual leadership. Before that closed-door session of ministers adjourned I ventured to ask if we might not pass a word of our conclusions and take it out of there as a message, that our conviction of the present situation of the church, so far as we were in position to observe it, was that the chief hindrance to the progress of the church to-day must be ascribed to the lamentably low ebb of the spiritual life of the church membership. Immediate objections were raised to the suggestion in fear that such a declaration would not be understood and might result in embarrassment to the ministry. I accepted their judgment for the company as a whole, but said that as for myself I would proceed to my own pulpit and say there to my people the very thing I am convinced should be said in the most searching earnestness throughout Christendom to-day. I did try to say it there, too, as an appeal, and to beg of my congregation, in all the lives they lived into our community, for Christ's sake and for his great church's sake, let us all and each

bring consecrate living up to its highest and seek, by every possible contrasting thing a consecrated life can witness to in this world, to tell everywhere we go the great Christian testimony.

I am sure the lack of genuine spiritual daring in experience among us at this hour is the greatest barrier to the effectual evangelization of the world. I cannot see how such a statement as that can cause any other feeling among us than an honest searching of all our hearts and lives, that we might put out of them anything and everything in practice or in thought that might be a hindrance to the one greatest contribution we can make to the religious life of the world.

I was much interested recently in a comment, made in analysis of some letters that had been submitted to the Board of Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church regarding the need of a spiritual movement in the church. One of the bishops declared the danger of the letters lay in the liability of their enthusiasm in a cramped horizon. He said: "Most of the letters moved on the assumption that all the world needs is a deeper religious experience on the part of its individuals. Nobody can gainsay the truth of that, but if it means that the Church of Christ is to pay less heed to the cry of the whole world for the application of Christian principles to the larger human relations—to industrial, international, racial contacts—well, the applications

will be made by forces outside the church, to the vast loss of the church and the world. These letters seem to assume that out of personal conversions social transformations will inevitably and spontaneously follow. But no such result takes place, except as the duty of enlarging human horizons and sanctifying all human relationships is made part of the evangelistic message itself."

Now, of course all that very keen presumption which the bishop insists upon is the very goal toward which the whole movement of Christian character must move. The way to accomplish a Christian society, however, is by the accomplishment of Christian members of society. The day is long past when the purpose of any individual evangelism can be shut up in the mere measure of that individual's soul security. It is the influence of such a soul living such a life in society that I am concerned with. When we can have the genuine living of Christianity by Christian people straight into every distressing thing of human relationships, we will be well on the way of the Christian solution of those distresses.

A man presented me with a fine little clock recently. In his speech of presentation he told me what a correct timepiece it was. He told the well-worn story of the clock in the jeweler's window that was fifteen minutes late, and the whole village missed everything it seemed desirous of making. As he told the story there came rush-

ing to me across the years a thing I saw when but a lad in my home town of Emporia. I saw a man stop by the fence of the county courthouse and carefully set his watch by the big clock-face high held in the tower there. I could scarce restrain my laughter till he had gotten far enough away for me to dare enjoy it. Our county in those days, in order to save money, had hired a painter, rather than buy a clock, and the painter had placed a hypocrite in the tower. I have often wondered what that man missed, or how many other strangers across the years may have set their watches by a painted dial.

The chief speech in all the world is the Sermon on the Mount. I read a book recently made up of the permanent great speeches of the world and the choice place was given to that speech of our Master, but it was titled "The Conduct of Life." The whole address is framed around the contrast of the Christian and the non-Christian way of living. " 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, . . . but I say.' That is the argument. You have been influenced in your conduct by all those common standards of accepted ordinary living. But I, your Lord and Master, am now declaring better standards for you. You are a peculiar people. You have superior obligations. All the common comparative motives in conduct, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' 'Hate your enemies,' 'Return evil for evil'—all these, what-

ever-they-be, accepted practices of living about you, are mere matters of ordinary living. But you are folks in particular. You are called with a high calling, and must so walk. The qualification of your conduct is not to be dictated by the cheap idea that this is the way others live. Your conduct is not dictated by the world. You who are in possession of real convictions of action should have somewhat yourself in influence on them."

Christianity's object lesson is the individual Christian. God's people have always been a separate people. They never were allowed, and are not allowed now, no matter how wise it may seem or how expedient the reason for it may appear to be, "to partake of anything heathen," of whatever profit. That was the distinguishment of old as the attempt was made to separate the special people for their special service. "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord."

The uncompromising gospel, taught and lived by our Lord and his disciples and established with such uncompromising position by the apostle Paul, made this bold antagonism of every evil thing. Such a fact, of course, made it at once very unpopular, but the same fact was likewise the secret of its wonderful influence, once incarnated in even a few consistent lives of humblest folks. It found at its very beginning an age in which great, proud, confident Rome was

tolerant of many religions. Tolerated them because they opposed nothing. Tolerated them because they brought mere forms of worship and harmless precepts. Built a great Pantheon and made place for the enthronement of all religions. There was, however, no place for Christianity there. Rome's attitude toward Christianity was immediately different. It could not be put in her Pantheon. Christ is a divine protest. His presence unsettles everything wrong. The religion he established was an uncompromising protest against all evil everywhere for the reason it was evil. It dares be nothing less now. It never did seek to conform to accepted usages. It faced them the rather with determined protest. It took square issue with and overthrew old customs. It never lost its power until it compromised. The Middle Ages, with their shroud of darkness and stumbling failure across history, were years when whole tribes of people, without any change of life, were called Christians as mere diplomacy. Civilization was turned back a thousand years by the process. The Church of Jesus Christ was wounded in its very heart. The reward to our faith which has come out of such an age has been the reward of a rediscovered fact—that if Christianity is to be regnant, it must be pure. The mission of our faith is to cleanse and purify the world. We were not sent to dilute evil. Our commission is not to dimin-

ish wrong. We have been set in this world to live the gospel and practice the life of Him who came to destroy evil. We have not been chosen to experiment with evil, to discover just how much we can assimilate without being gripped with its fatality. I read with interest the daily reports made of the famous poison squad. Rugged young fellows attempting under careful supervision to balance themselves along the always uncertain edge of poison danger. The best verdict I think they found was that none of them died. That is, however, such a scant report to make on life. They were not engaged in finding how strong and healthy and ministrant life could be built up to be. They were merely trying to discover whether or no a strong healthy life could be kept from dying if it indulged in dangerous diet. The question for a healthy obligated man who is to make return in service is not just how much poison he can successfully throw off, but how can he get wholesome, life-giving, uncontaminated food, in order that his body may respond with all its powers to the demands for service. The only safe scale of conduct for a Christian life is well defined in the Book: "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." The attitude is absolute. It is not of adjustment and so-called worldly prudence

toward offering expedients. It is the regenerative life and light of the divine gospel in a fertile soil, and plowed deep and torn apart by the gleaming plowshares of God's clear commandments.

I have been reading again, as I have so many times read for my own emotional help, the wonderful story of the wonderful life of that great flaming preacher, Savonarola. I count his the most eloquent tongue Catholicism ever produced, and it took a great fire to burn his tongue still, but to let the flame of his appeal glow to us all forever. I have sat in his old cell in the monastery, where they have on the walls in a lovely glass case a few sticks of wood, charred into fame forever, for being part of the pyre that consumed the martyr. The stir of that eloquent Florentine stirred anew the almost dead ideals of his day. At one of the most thrilling crises of his whole career, with a vast throng surging around him, at the conclusion of his most passionate appeal, he cried out to the city he loved and whose salvation he sought as the one consuming desire of his heart, "Oh Florence! Florence! Behold, behold, this Christ is Lord. Lord of the universe, and would be thine. Wilt thou have him for thy King?" His eloquence swept over that vast throng of hearers, down whose upturned faces ran the tears of earnestness as they cried out, "Long live Christ our King!" Would God that someone might arise before this

very crucial and much-troubled day of ours and turn its face toward God and show it again its Lord and Master.

When the calling need of this great hour comes clamoring to my ears, as it surely has been coming of late, and I am compelled to look at my own little self, a poor ill-talented preacher standing thisward, such heroic souls as have gone before me; great, daring, flaming souls who went up and down the earth in consecrate might to sow it to the rich truths of our faith; souls of the deepest piety; souls of uncomplaining sacrifice; souls of goodly example; souls of flaming eloquence—when I think of those who make the backgrounds of our great day and out from whose combined heritage I am emerged to stand and preach now, I feel to fall upon my shame-flushed face in penitence for the condemning little I have done.

This task of being a Christian to-day is one tremendous challenging task. We cannot compromise it. It can be satisfied only by being fulfilled. It demands absolute goodness. May God strengthen our poor weak hands and cleanse our little stained hearts. The overwhelming meaning in the cross of Christ has not begun to frame itself into our convictions and conduct until we have learned to see in it how God feels toward all sin and uncleanness. We too must partake of the same feeling. Sin is a thing so very horrible and completely accursed that only

in the awful shadow of that Calvary tragedy can we think about it aright. Jesus Christ must take it somehow to that cross. Never mind theology now. Whether we be able to explain it or no, sin must be there on that trembling hill thrust through with the spear of his suffering. It must be by some divine process washed out by that priceless blood. Whatever be the stumbling logic of our theology, Calvary is an eloquent declaration of God that he can find no other remedy for us and for all.

Running through the whole Bible is one great tireless exhortation. A great word that should be written across our great day. The Christian trade-mark—"Righteousness." For Christ's sake now that word should characterize his church everywhere. There is a great sense in which Christianity rests its case on our conduct. It stands or falls to some life somewhere with you and with me. It will never fail in its mission, unless its endeavor suffers betrayal by the inconsistent lives of those of us who have professed its claims upon us. The Christian must be evident. "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord." I pledge God my life. I wish it were worth more. I pledge God my thought. I pledge him my influence. I am determined to know in my soul that I am wholly his. "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

VII

"THERE IS NOTHING"[1]

"And (he) said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times.—*1 Kings 18. 43.*

"AND (he) said, There is nothing. . . . And he said, Go again." That furnishes the point of real interest to me in this famous story. It is a quick-drawn sketch of faith, faced by a lack of evidence, which refuses to allow such a report to be final. There is always an illogical conduct before faith. It is forever drawing its conclusions just beyond its observations. "There is nothing." "Go again."

These are days of expert observation. Never were men so sure of what they could see, or could not see, as they are now. Their report is set in a confidence of finality too. When it is in, there is no appeal. The scientific report has a bearing that brooks no dispute. It has presumed upon its accuracy with a conduct that has made marked impression upon religion, and the "go again" response of faith has not had a very large recognition of late. "There is nothing," has sounded so conclusive. There is a very clear call

[1] Reprinted by permission of *The Christian Century*.

to-day for a faith that will be content to be just faith. We need a vision in religion that will catch the true testimony of an "evidence not seen." Something that will vindicate the great apostle's definition of what faith really is, is the prime need of the hour.

One of the very interesting, and surely one of the most indicative-of-the-times books that has been published within the recent past, carries the very apt title, *A Faith That Enquires.* It is in every way a strong book, and always in defense of a faith that eagerly hunts for a reason for its position. It goes inquiringly. It not only is not afraid, it is determined, rather, to know whatever is to be found out. The treatment is purely modern in its interpretation of faith, and puts that wholesome flavor upon the conduct of religion to-day which it must never allow to be questioned in a scientific age, namely, that there can be no fear in facts for true faith. Religion can never be built up on the crumbling idea that anything true can ever hurt it. There is not a policy of concealment permissible in genuine Christian evidences.

There is, however, something unsatisfactory in such an attitude of faith. There seems ever to be an element of suspicion and a lack of genuine confidence in the manifest eagerness of such inquiry. It is a modern edition of the apostle Thomas, who doubtless produced a very fine re-

sult in Christian service, and helped disclose some valuable evidence by what he required, but he never wrote his own faith in the highest terms, as long as he stood with shaking head, declaring that he would never believe in a resurrected Lord until he could actually thrust his bold fingers into the torn, tender palms of Him whose death had broken down his whole interpretation of what the true Messiah should be. There is a finer conduct of faith than inquiry. It is not at its best with a question-mark for its guide. There is an uncompromising confidence that characterizes faith at its best.

"There is nothing." It is the short, conclusive report of the servant of Elijah, who had been sent out to a favorable point of observation to look for a cloud in a sky that had been so long cloudless that any sort of a cloud would be news. There was not much enthusiasm in the servant as he went, for he could see enough of the sky from where he was to settle his own conclusions. It was a quite listless sort of a report he brought back that time, that was to prove but the introductory report, as he said, "There is nothing." He was startled at the sharp answer his report stirred, as his master replied, "Go again."

The attraction in this incident, to me, lies in our use of it as an approach in studying the content of faith. The situation is tragic in liability. Faith stands challenged by facts, a thing not un-

common, and a liable essential in the victory of every soul's faith. Can I hold my faith when all signs fail? That is a fair question. It is all right to inquire. Send the servant out to look. Tell him to look well too. But don't hold your faith with so slight a grip as to endanger it if the inquiry brings a negative report. Faith may need the challenge of a contradictory report. I am sure the very fact of present-day emphasis on inquiry is to prove to be the refining fire of a finer faith that shall come out of our super-inquisitive tendency and show itself pure and permanent in its ministry.

A Critical Time

Written all around this text I have chosen is the tragic story of one of the most crucial periods of Elijah's life. For more than three years the people of suffering Israel had turned their sun-browned faces up to a brazen sky hoping for some sign of rain. The earth had been swept clean of all vegetation by the hot breath of a continuous drought. The springs and pools had all been licked dry. The king had given Obadiah his servant, and the governor of his house, a special commission to seek out all fountains and pools—peradventure grass enough might be found to save the lives of the horses and mules of the royal stables. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, the

skies refused to bring relief. You who have never experienced a real drought of even one season cannot imagine the torture there is in looking upon parched fields—the flying, choking clouds of dust, the dead rustle of the dried foliage shaken by hot winds, the panting cattle, driven long distances once a day for a drink in some wasting pool of a one-time river, the unflecked dull sky that burns with the concentrated rays of a merciless sun.

The people, at first angry with Elijah, began to wear down to distressful appreciation of their helplessness. Distress has often been a constructive process in religious inclination. It seems so easy to forget God while brooks run full, and flowers bloom to fresh fragrance, and rich crops hang heavy afield. It may be a necessary process in growing character, to dry folks, at times, out of their little pastures of selfishness into which their prosperity has blindly led them. Knock a man's earth props out from under him, and see how quickly he looks for God. I am sure many of these people changed their attitude toward Elijah as they went choking along in the dust, month by month. The Lord was able to change his servant's boarding place, and release the ravens, and send Elijah over to Zarephath to be the unexpected guest at the table of a poor widow woman, whose wasting barrel of meal he renewed and kept supplied.

The Ear of Faith

Events come on hurrying feet now. The great meeting in challenge with the false prophets was convincingly concluded, and the acclaimed victor arose and said in welcome confidence, "Behold the sound of abundance of rain is in the land." It was surely the word of a prophet. The keen ear of faith alone could hear rain then. None other could detect it. They listened intently too. There was not a cloud. They would believe such a testimony when they could see great lowering clouds and hear the welcome roar of thunder on the hills.

But the man of God, whose ear heard beyond the sound of the fields, declared he could hear the sound of an abundant rain. And so saying, he withdrew himself to the top of Mount Carmel to pray. I have wished we had the record of some of those prayers. In a matter-of-fact manner he said to his servant, "Go now, and look over toward the sea for the coming of a cloud." How good a cloud does look—just any cloud—in a season of drought! The servant was not gone long. He swept the heavens with an easy glance that was sure before he looked, and came back in a most uninteresting manner to say, "My master, there is nothing."

"Go back and look again. I fear you did not look with care." To his knees the prophet fell,

and as he awaited the returning message, he poured out his soul to God. It was not long, however, for to the servant the trip was a mere confirmation of what he had already reported. He came back with a step more firm than it had been before, and with an inflection in his sentence that carried somewhat of a sense of triumph he said, "Master, there is nothing."

A Brazen Sky

"Go again!" came the command of the challenged faith. "Maybe you have been too expectant. Don't look now for a storm. Remember, you are only looking for a cloud." Again the prophet prayed. After a somewhat longer absence the servant came and said, in the manner of carefully found conviction, "Master, there is nothing. I tell you there is nothing." Good servant that he was, I fancy that he suggested then, as a possible offering in encouragement, "Shall I go once more?"

"Go again," was the unfaltering word. I have thought, as the servant climbed again to the point of lookout, that there might have been in his soul a wondering how he could find somehow an encouragement for his famous master. But the brazen sky held no sign, and there was no possibility of concealment, for he could sweep the whole horizon. "There is nothing," once more the report was made.

There is an ancient tradition that this servant was the son of the widow of Zarephath, the boy whom Elijah had raised from the dead. I like the story anyhow, and the way the boy acted in this repetitious test bears evidence that he was no ordinary servant. Again the fifth time he ran to look while his master prayed. The returning feet of the messenger startled Elijah, and he looked up to ask, "What did you see?" "There is nothing!"

Reporting Facts

"Well," said the prophet, "you know it takes a cloud some time to form into visible shape, and by the time you get back there again you will likely make out the outline of a cloud. There is one forming out there. It is now either not quite dense enough to see, or else you have grown so used to a bare sky that you look for no other sort. Go now again."

Shortly he came stumbling back, almost carelessly now. Mocked, perhaps, he felt, by the constant repetition of cloudless skies, and he said with utter weariness in his voice, "There is nothing. Not a spot in the sky. My eyes are good, too. I am speaking the truth. There is nothing."

"Go again!" answered the faith whose challenge had been but the means of brightening it. "Go now and look carefully along that misty line

where sky and sea meet yonder. You know there are some clouds that lie below the horizon; clouds that have not yet thrust up heads of recognition. Maybe you can find a point of higher vantage. Over to the right there it looks a bit higher than where you have been. Try that. Stand on tiptoe now and see if you cannot make out the lines of a cloud out there."

Yonder on the very highest point he stands. Away to the west lies the great sea. The sun was sinking again as it had for so many months toward a cloudless evening. Suddenly the eye of the tired watcher caught something not visible before. Just a bit of unevenness on the horizon's edge. He shaded his face from the reflecting glare. It's a cloud! Not a big cloud. No larger than a man's hand. But I have not been cautioned as to size. All I am to report on is facts. It may seem a small vessel in which to carry a drink to so thirsty a land as is this, but it is a cloud. I will report. Walking hurriedly back, he ran a little as his faith increased. He interrupted his master even at his prayer, and said with a new inflection in his voice, "Yes, I saw a cloud. It was no larger than my hand. It is coming up out of the sea."

Elijah cared nothing about the size of the cloud. He knew that God is forever growing great things out of seeming littles. Without even going to look for himself, or to confirm the re-

port, he said in active comment, "Arise quickly. Run and tell Ahab the king that he get his chariots and rush home that the rain stop him not." And hurrying for shelter themselves—you know the story of how it rained.

I

I learn here that, even in the face of explicit promises, the Lord for a time may allow us to see no signs. Elijah had been told that rain would come again only on his own word, and he had all the reason of his faith to believe it. But, cherishing the promise, he must still linger, and wait, and pray, and believe, straight into the repeating report of a negative observation.

There is significant spiritual truth in this for this peculiarly confident day of ours, that prides itself on its ability to discern the sky. There is oppressive influence on spiritual life in every scientific negative. Faith seems to have grown faint in many places, and to accept the ordinary observations of the sky as the conclusive reports for religion as well. There may be in most of us an instinctive impulse that will express itself in prayer once, for something, and maybe in anxiety, and in hope that is born of anxiety, we can pray twice. But when three and four times we have had to be told there still is visible absolutely nothing, we are ready to quit. It is so easy for men and women with eyes, to

walk by sight, and it is so hard to walk by faith. "There is nothing," is a report to chill faith.

I incline to the judgment that this is to be the finest religious contribution which we are to receive from this super-scientific age of ours, a challenge to true faith.

Abundance of Rain

It is a great thing to hear Elijah say as he looked out over those parched fields, and up into those dried-out skies, "I hear the sound of abundance of rain." We must never get delay and denial confused in our interpretation of faith. It is not a denial for our answers to be delayed. Though we cannot see a cloud, we have the promise, and that is enough. They had no weather bureaus in those days. Had there been one, there would have been flying from the staff on Mount Carmel a square white flag. The people would have said, "There's no use praying against that. Wait till they change flags anyhow. There will be plenty of uncertainty even then to make the risk large enough to try faith." But Elijah did not pray by the barometer. He stood on the promises of God.

The world has always had to stand in respect before the character of genuine faith. The Bible carries the fact often. Fascinating figure of patient faith, that poor stumbling blind man whom Jesus met along the road one day. The very

mixing of a bit of mud to paste upon his sightless sockets was in itself a severe test. What a super-test it must have been, as with mud-spattered face, he felt his dark way through the crowd, going blindly on to do a strange thing he had been told to do. All sorts of things must have been said to him as he went. What a mark for ridicule he must have presented! Many souls would perhaps have made the start, simply because of the desperation of blindness. But few of them would have gone stumbling on toward the designated pool, and not have stopped to dig off that humbling clay with chagrined disgust. If this Jesus could cure me, or really desired to cure me, why did he not do so? This thing of sending me along this trying way with mud in my blind eyes, to be the butt of all this ridicule, is too much. Many souls would have argued thus, and would have received the short-sighted congratulations of the logical crowd along the street, as they turned in at some wayside basin to wash the humbling mud away, rather than go on to the pool; and then would have lifted again their sightless faces to grin a sickly, embarrassed grin out into the same persistent darkness they knew so well. But this man went on. Faithfully he stumbled out the last step along the way to the place Jesus assigned, and there found, to his great joy, that everything God commands finds full justification in its performance.

God's ways do not always burst clear upon our vision. It is entirely for our good that the cloud is not always to be seen the first time we scan the horizon for a sign. Along this rugged pathway the genuine adventures of faith have always come. The apostle Paul, that fierce night of shipwreck, when everything had gone to pieces, and all feared they were doomed to destruction, stood amid the sinking hull and broken spars and said, "Be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be so as it hath been spoken to me."

Dost thou believe? Then stand thou to that belief. Never mind the cloud. Listen for the rain, which can be heard in the very promise itself.

II

The second deduction I would make here is that God's promises are better than signs in the sky. The real spirit of faith is concerned but very little with signs. It knows the sign will come, not as a cause of faith, but as a credential of faith. Don't get them crossed. What more do I want than God's word? His promise is my incentive. On it I take no denial though all reports agree against me. There is nothing! What a silencer that report has been!

If men were looking for signs, a cloud as large as a man's hand would have been mockery. That drought had been across whole years. The ves-

sel that brings relief to such desperation must not be a little thing. The Church of God on earth must take a bolder stand in the expectant promises of God. We have been watching too diligently for signs, and our endeavors have been constantly hampered by a demanded encouragement. We want religious business to be made just as humanly plain in its action as any of the business we construct on our own market reports. A man said to me recently, with the inflection of a confident criticism in his sentence, "What are the signs that we are doing any good in the missionary field?" I answered him quickly that the visible signs are to-day genuinely abundant. But in doing our God-directed duty we are not to move on signs. We would be just as much obligated to-day if through all the years the sacrifice of the watchers and workers had brought no report whatever. If the Christian Church had moved only on signs, it would still be in the narrow place of its birth.

During one of the most trying and desperate days in the early period of American history a man wrote Benjamin Franklin in pessimistic conclusion, "The sun of liberty has set." The great old patriot who was not afraid of the dark wrote back, "Then light up the candles." Sometimes God does hold back all signs, to test our faith. We are expected to presume on the promises. Our faith has been timid, and has ventured

only as far as we could clearly see. The world awaits, and not only awaits, but challenges a confident church; a church that laughs at the report, "There is nothing," as a mere sign men have always dared read into a barren sky, and declares triumphantly to every negative finding, "There is something! We have God's word." March on, O Church of God! Cloud or no cloud, we hear the sound of abundance of rain.

III

My final observation is that failure is an unknown experience for faith. The temperature of faith is always the same, sign or no sign. The report comes in, "There is nothing"; faith answers, "There is God, and that's enough." This is faith's test, can it wring confidence out of a cloudless sky? Can it be so unfaltering that even the seventh time it can calmly reply to the messenger, "Go back again, for surely if you want to see a cloud there is one out there somewhere." We are not to have faith in God because of a cloud. Anybody could do that. We are to have faith which will insist that clouds must come because of it. The sky is sure one day to have the credentials of faith stamped upon it. But faith must be strong enough to stand secure without a cloud in sight.

I am not called upon to explain the actions of my God according to the laws of nature I

have thus far been able to decipher, and of which I feel reasonably sure. Very many of the explanations I have tried to read would make God out as a huge sleight-of-hand worker, who makes use of natural laws just beyond our range of knowledge, with which he merely fools our vision. Explainers thus have busied themselves drawing parallels in what we know to-day that would have been incredible to the generation just gone. Thus by human process they seek to reduce so-called miracles to the simple acts of a master-mechanic before a class of dull pupils. As for me, I have never expected to find out God with human wisdom. When I believe him God, my idea of understanding vanishes. There is a passage somewhere in the writings of Sir Humphry Davy that expresses the desire of a truly great mind when it stands before the consciousness of its own easily realized limitations, "I envy no quality of mind or intellect in others, be it genius, power, wit, or fancy; but I would prefer a firm religious faith before every other blessing."

The true ministry of Christian experience has put this confident note into life, and even down to the very last report that can come, when the closing shades of death seem to screen all vision, so the watchers in the attendant gloom say there is nothing, even there we find that faith has not failed, and has transformed groping into vision.

"I know not where his islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond his love and care."

Say you there is nothing? Go and look again. Go back again, and again, and again. For against such a report I will forever match my deathless faith in God. We have God.

VIII

THE PERFECT SALVATION[1]

"Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us."—*2 Corinthians 1. 10.*

I HAVE never heard a sermon from this verse. I have not in any of my sermonic literature a sermon based upon it. In the commentaries I have at my disposal all the comment I have been able to find has been that this is a difficult passage, which so far as I am able to make out is no particular distinguishment these days. But here stands this fine verse in the homiletic fascination of a self-analyzed passage carrying all those great throbs of Christian memory and experience and hope which are the most preachable matters of our faith.

The book of Second Corinthians opens with a most gracious salutation. It bears the message of comfort in a manner most impressive. I incline to feel that the whole book catches its flavor at its very beginning. Paul was making clear the fact of the experience of real comfort and help in distress, and the obligated helpfulness which such an experience put upon those

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who had it. I am ready to say, after an experience in the ministry running through more than thirty years, and furnishing a cross section of service from the humblest country circuit to the most complex demands of the metropolitan situation, I am ready to say that the prime test of a genuine religion is its ability to stand in the midst of great trouble and of deep liability and bring actual comfort. The apostle Paul was close to his very best when, with his great pen dripping the flavor of his soul's richest knowledge, he wrote here this great preceding verse, "The God of all comfort; who comforted us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforteth of God." That great verse has come down the ages in constant accumulation of its beautiful meaning. I well remember when first I came to realize its worth. One of the memorably challenging moments of my ministry took its stand right here.

A big, strong man had fallen by a sudden stroke. He was a father upon whose strong service a large family depended. The mother and nine children were left. It hurt us all as we gathered in the stricken home, and we eagerly sought for every helpfulness we knew. Two weeks later the mother, in the price of a yet multiplied motherhood, broken in her grief beyond

the demand of her strength, likewise fell before the grim sickle. There stood those huddling children alone. They lived on a farm. There was a heavy mortgage clinging to it. I turned to this great verse and sought for some words to say as nearly a Christian thing as I could say that difficult day. All the crowding farmer folk who came pressing into that grief-filled house were broken of heart, but determined of soul. Not one hand was withheld. Not one heart was unmoved. We did try to comfort them with the comfort we too had found. It challenged all the religious helpfulness we had. I went to see the man who held the mortgage. It was a heavy mortgage for such a farm. But he was a man and a Christian. This same great verse was ringing in his soul. He said to me as I opened the door of his office and before I could tell my mission, "Don't worry about that mortgage." And that fine group of grief-bound children, strengthened by the offered comfort of those to whom the faith had been helpful, worked their way out of it all to a great victory. They paid that mortgage. They preserved their home. I never rode down that country way and failed to look toward that farm and pray for them.

Out across the years comes this fine passage here, laden with such comfort and blessed by accumulated memories. That was what was in the heart of the author of our text when he wrote

this whole book of saturate comfort about the God of all comfort. Then he goes on to tell of a most desperate experience through which he had just passed. He was almost dead. He had never told them about it. "I was given up to die while in Asia. I was pressed out of measure, pressed even beyond my strength. My life was despaired of. Everyone gave up hope." Then he writes in this very great and refreshing verse. Through all this he declares he learned to trust in God, "who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us."

Note the comprehensive statement of the perfect salvation which God has prepared for those who trust him. Who did deliver us! The testimony of memory, the sure evidence from the past. Who doth deliver us! The satisfied declaration of experience. The evidence of the present. Who will deliver us! The confidence for the future. The assurance of our hope. It would be impossible to find a verse more beautifully self-analyzed, or more homiletically perfect in its statement of our satisfactory faith. The Perfect Salvation! God who did deliver us, who does deliver us, who will deliver us! For the past I am grateful. For the present I am satisfied. For the future I am confident. I would write this great fact in terms of real experience into all our lives.

1. Who did deliver us. Thank God for the vigorous testimony brought by memory in confirmation of our faith out of an eloquent past. If I were confined to personal terms in the telling of this great story, I could bring from the archives of all our lives the full confirmation of this claim. Doubtless in one way that is a matter in which all of God's people should be finding a continuous satisfaction. It is, to be exact, the very application Paul was making as the basis of this great declaration of the text. He was building his great heartening message to all Christendom upon the satisfactory experience through which he had passed. He saved me.

But there is always a way in which every personal thing overlaps every personal horizon and becomes a great declaration for general testimony. When one speaks of the past in terms of religion he must touch a large range. The testimony of the satisfactory service of a God who did deliver is a matter that carries age-over meaning. It is confirmed by the prophets and saints of old. It takes its place in an unbroken line back into all the past can be made to mean.

Thank God for the faith that has come down the ages to bring us assurance now. How nobly it has come! Nothing has been able to turn it back. When we speak of the past out of which

underestimating the Christian faith in Russia.

triumphantly our faith has come on, we cannot imagine any test that has not already been met. We read and read and read again that never tiring, always refreshing heroic chapter in the Epistle to the Hebrews and rejoice in the noble company who shout their convincing stories across the ages. By faith Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, and Moses, and Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, and Jephthae, and David! And oh, such a great and inspiring army, for whose names there was not room! Victors across life's most severe trials. They subdued kingdoms; wrought righteousness; obtained promises; stopped the mouths of lions; quenched the violence of fire; escaped the edge of the sword; out of weakness became strong; waxed valiant in fight; turned to flight the armies of the aliens; received their dead raised to life again; were tortured not accepting deliverance, thus obtaining even a better resurrection; had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings; were bound and imprisoned. They were stoned. They were sawn asunder. They were tempted. They were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and in goat-skins. They were destitute, afflicted, tormented. The world was not worthy of these. They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. These all having obtained a good report through faith

received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. Thus we read the heroic chapter, and refresh our faith to-day in the fadeless story of yesterday. We thank God for the great list, this side of which we take our stand with a courage that draws new strength from all those who have gone on before us. We do not believe the great chapter was completed when the list as recorded in the Book was made. We believe the very same inheritance of that very same experience has been recorded right along down the unbroken story of the Church of God. The same deliverance that was made glorious by their stories has not failed even until now, and we tune our song to all the saints forever—

"For all the saints, who from their labours rest,
Who thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blessed,
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might;
Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true light,
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl, streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

Oh Church of God, we should make sure to write the unbroken list of triumphant deliverance right down to our own day! Thanks be unto God, who did deliver us! On every page of the great story thus far written stands the unbroken record of this thrilling fact. We cannot read back into it without the quickening pulse of our own purpose being roused within us.

How many, many times we have gone to that strange and surcharged spot on the banks of the Tyne at Jarrow! The sacred influence of The Venerable Bede has gripped the souls of thousands. There stands in sacred treasure the old chair in which he sat while he made the famous translation that lingers yet to testify to his name. From it we can almost see him, frail but mighty, as he arose for the last time to speak the final words of the beautiful Gospel of Saint John, and then sank to his knees to die. Then to Durham we go to look again at that strange, massive coffin, a magnetic center of our interest. Made out of one great oaken log, and mounted on four crude rough wheels. In that shared coffin, you remember, they placed the bodies of both Bede and Cuthbert, and when days of great crisis arose, those people who loved their great leaders would wheel those bodies about, that the sacred influence of the characters they seemed to make real among them might again lend aid

in the great test. Howsoever all such superstition may sound now to us in this proud day of far-advanced enlightenment, there nevertheless does come still to all of us the sacred strength of the precious past. We know those victories. We know those deliverances. We do take courage. We do believe by them now. We would wheel out with us as we go all the sacred memories of all those, down all the long way, who have come through everything life and death can mean; and above their memories and established in the confidences of their victories would shout, Thanks be unto God, who did deliver us from so great a death.

2. Who does deliver us? Our salvation is not a mere matter of memory. It does not ground itself alone upon the past. It is not a preservation. It is an experience now. He does deliver us.

We have never been able to recognize the real value and power of history as it is being written. To-day never seems as wonderful and conclusive as does yesterday. Nor does it seem so luring or full of hope as does to-morrow. There is strange tendency in all of us to look behind or ahead of us for real inspiration. Remembering things that are gone, and pressing toward those things that are before, we easily forget that we are engaged in the actual encounter of to-day. These streets we know are so hard. These days are so

strenuous. These heart-aches are so very painful. These sorrows are so real. These temptations are so very trying. Oh, to-day, to-day, is a heavy struggling hour for sure! Our feet are weary. Our hearts are heavy. Our souls are bowed down. We are actually engaged with life just as it is. There is always some sweet forgetfulness of the past, which seems to bury from our real appreciation much that made it hard, and to leave for us to cherish only the residue of helpfulness of it all. But oh, this hard to-day. It lacks romance in the rigid reality of it all. We know it so well; the sun of noon, the weariness of the flesh, the strain of soul—this is life just now.

This great verse struck in here from the immediate triumphant experience of Paul was offered to those brethren, and was set glowing to all who should come afterward, as a precious possession of all the church forever at the exact point of present requirement. My God doth deliver me now. That is exactly up to the last minute—religion's immediate help. No excuses are made. No reservations are required. Life is met just as it is. There can be no more vital word to get said to this day of ours than that. Our religion is not a mere matter of history, neither is it a matter of persistent hope. For history and hope, both and each, we are grateful. But experience, as the present opportunity

of life, we are glad for. We are in step with life now. God is still with his people.

"A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing."

God does deliver us now. Upon the strong emphasis of this immediate experience almost every great forward movement in the church's history has been founded. The theology which has attended the great revivals has always been that which has been cast into the alembic of experience. It has been tried by the hard-edged challenge of the life about it. It demands a creed that can accompany courage. It must stand victoriously in the midst of life.

One night that rugged and wonderful worker among men whose lives had been broken by sin, Sam Hadley, was speaking to a large gathering of poor wrecks who had come into the doors of his mission hall. A trained physician sat among the men as an observer of a condition which drew him merely out of curiosity. The vigorous appeal of the preacher for immediate decision for a new life finally so impressed the physician that he could not restrain the protest of his scientific objection to it all, and he arose and speaking feelingly said: "Mr. Hadley, you have been appealing here with a glowing passion to these drunkards for a new and a made-over life. I speak as a physician to say that you would not

talk to these men thus if you had ever seen what the inside of a drunkard's stomach looks like." As quick as a flash from the experience which was the basis of all the great mission worker's preaching, he replied, "Sir, I had a drunkard's stomach, and Jesus Christ saved me from it, and saves me from it now." How eloquently does genuine experience always meet life! We challenge the whole world with the testimony of this salvation. It is the most convincing preachment we have. Oh for a witnessing church! Your experience—don't leave it out! Who doth deliver us. We have a salvation that meets life actually. We are not compelled to make one exception. "Come unto me, all ye." Oh, write that across life. Write it across life everywhere in the terms of your own experience. Write it against hardship. Write it against ease. Write it against sorrow. Write it against joy. Write it against old age. Write it against youth. Write it against life. Write it against death. Who doth deliver us—thank God!

3. Who will deliver us. Hope and the future. We have already come on fast enough to warrant us in an on-reaching conclusion that will not turn back, however far life may have yet to run. We have read enough history to vindicate the confidence we profess. The race has certainly come on through convincing experience. We have ourselves individually met life in such complicate

situations that we feel sure of our right to draw our conclusion.

We lift now our faces toward the great to-morrow. We are not troubled. We are not afraid. He will deliver us. This is the face-forward confidence of our religion.

There is a very satisfactory privilege opened to us to look back through all life has thus far meant. We have God's word to cover it all. I thank God every day of my life for what I have come safely past.

"Thus far the Lord hath led me on,
Thus far his power prolongs my days;
And every evening shall make known,
Some fresh memorial of his grace."

There is likewise a secure confidence, I feel, in the fact of to-day's experience. I know Him as my salvation now. This is indeed a testing day. Life runs at me aflood now. Dangers are all about me. It does require the genuine power of a real faith to stand victorious now. But I am confident in this very significant day and hour to announce this Christian sufficiency.

Upon all life has been and is, I have built up in my soul an unshakable faith for the future. He will deliver me. I believe I know somewhat the meaning of such a declaration as that. There is much ahead. Life may even yet have tests for me that are more fierce than anything through

which thus far I have had to pass. I am come on out of youth into mid-life. The noontime of the struggle is a trying hour. Much of life's worst tragedy, I know too, has come in the afternoon. There is something about that cry of the psalmist for the defense from the pestilence that wasteth at noonday that makes me feel that he had been in the hard task of the noon of life. I want to write my confidence right now at that very crucial hour. Not in the approach of the battle. That is hard. I have seen fine young fellows, as brave as any soldiers, lose control of themselves as they came up to the battle. It is a great test. My own son said to me, before he had felt the shock of actual battle, and when the anticipation of it was in his soul, "I don't want to lose my nerve going in." I can speak religiously now of life in the very midst of the conflict. He does deliver me. But I know there is yet to be the test of the evening time. I read with very great interest in our news columns recently an account of a man who had been conducting some experiments in hypnotism over wild beasts. He had just cowed a powerful lion into unconsciousness, and turning to speak to the wondering spectators that great beast recovered himself and leaped fiercely upon the trainer and tore his arm into shreds. I am not haunted as I look into the future with the liability of a merely hypnotized past that will come

again into the clamor of all its fierce threatenings. I go straight on to the evening time of my mortality in the assurance of the fact that all the dangers of my past life have not been hypnotized but forgiven, and blotted out of his book of remembrance.

Before me is death. He will deliver me. This is the forward confidence I would write across life. Write it to the very end.

> "Thus when the night of death shall come,
> My flesh shall rest beneath the ground,
> And wait thy voice to rouse the tomb,
> With sweet salvation in the sound."

I write these words immediately upon my return from the grave where we left the mortal remains of one of the most heroic Christian young men I have ever known. Just as youth was catching strong step in noble purpose he was stricken with a most deadly disease. So far as has been known by medical science never but two cases have recovered. This young man declared he was going to be the third. He was in training as a physician. He immediately adopted every precaution in what he knew must be a long, long contest, if he should live. Day after day, for weeks, months, and years, that indomitable young soul fought that fight with death. Every day he held his rendezvous with death. He has accurately kept a scientific rec-

ord of his life for one thousand and fifteen days. He has charted, on an unbroken chart, the full record of his heart and his temperature, and in eleven volumes of carefully listed observations of life pursued by death he has left us his great story. Through it all, and down to the very last breath of it all, he has sung, and then asked us to sing it when he was gone,

"Through every day,
O'er all the way,
God will take care of you."

I stand as a preacher of the gospel of the Christian faith to gaze steadily ahead into tomorrow in the assurance of the promise we hold. He will deliver us.

Neither heights, nor depths, nor things present, nor things to come, nor life, nor death, nor any other creature, can invalidate this great salvation for me, now or ever.

He saved me yesterday. That involves all that my crimson sin had come to mean. He washed me from the guilt, and saved me from the power and dominion of sin.

He saves me to-day. That involves all that temptation, and faltering, and stumbling can mean. It can be spoken in all the meaning of the infinite tenderness of the infinite Saviour, who shielded from blame the poor sinful woman who wanted a chance at a new life, as well as

in the offered meaning of the infinite promise to help us all and each.

He will save me to-morrow. That involves all that can be run into the meaning of hell and heaven in the destiny of the human soul.

He is the God of our salvation, and it is not his desire that any soul should perish. O thou Christ of every human need! the past assures us, the present confirms us, the future secures us. We give thee our unfaltering allegiance. Memory, experience and hope confirm our salvation.

IX

RELIGIOUS ILLITERACY

"Some have not the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame."—*1 Corinthians 15. 34.*

THAT verse has always startled me. It is a strangely impressive statement, for the reason that it seems so unexpectedly set in the midst of a careful consideration of an entirely different matter. I read it in the continuous ministry of sorrow, for it is found in the great sentences of Paul in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, which is the regularly prescribed chapter from the New Testament in our ritual service for the funeral. It seems to break into the chapter. It is almost as startling here as though it had been said by someone present who had been heedless of the drift of the address, someone who thus had spoken absent-mindedly in another manner.

Paul was arguing for immortality. His now world-famous sentences were falling in impressive declaration in his well-chosen line of contention, when he thrusts in this Epicurian denunciation. I have personally been guilty of missing the strength of the sentence by daring to change a word, thinking it had a more applicable

meaning, and have read it, "I speak this to *their* shame." I do not make that very serious mistake any more.

I would separate this verse now for careful attention, and because there lies in the word I boldly and wrongly changed in my public reading the very significant fact of accusation over a matter of very great public concern. The Revised Version brings the meaning even more concentrate for our attention by making the clause read "I speak this to move you to shame." The argument standing here, then, is that there are some among you who are illiterate on religious matters—shame on you! The responsibility for that ignorance rests upon those of us to whom the task of spreading religious information is intrusted.

In the emphasis of this responsibility I desire now to consider the prevalent fact of religious illiteracy as a conscription of the very best endeavor all of us can make in religious education, and an appeal for the very great work of our Sunday schools, which should have the attention and the devotion and the enthusiastic support of every man and woman who really desires to help solve the most serious problem of our day.

The recovering days we have been busy with but confounded at since the Great War have been days when some real stock-taking in human

values has been done. Of some things we are now sure. Education in itself is not an unqualified blessing, nor is it a secure insurance. Of that we are convinced in a manner that is bound to qualify hereafter our pursuit of education. Education is in itself an immense liability, demanding control and direction. Its very strength produces its liability. Education for education has been a great passion, and it has done much whole field of education is engaged in mastering too. The new problem, however, now in the the power it possesses.

Somewhere in a book I was reading recently, and to which I cannot here pay credit for the reason I do not now remember what book it was, but somewhere I remember the thrust of a sentence which went so piercingly into my attention that it has directed my thinking a very great deal of late. The sentence was somewhat thus, and I put it into the language as I remember it, hence dare quotation marks: "The World War will have been waged in vain if it hands democracy over to an ignorant and godless people." The startle in that sentence to my thinking was contained in those compounded qualifications. I tried to separate them, and at once saw the meaning of their combination. I tried to think toward the possible fate of our democracy if it, as a form of government, should be intrusted to ignorance. What would be the effect upon the

people themselves, to say nothing of the impress upon the world? Perhaps this has been as far as we have been thinking in governmental interpretation of democracy. We are not without some real observations as to the liability of a democracy of ignorance. The suspicion that has always attended the establishment of democracy, and has been its ever-present and keenly watchful critic, has been founded in the essential fact of the individual's intellectual qualification. There is an easily aroused patriotism among us which can be stirred to great enthusiasm by demanding an educational qualification for the ballot. The very thoughtful sentence I endeavored to quote, however, forces us into a much more demanding liability. Suppose you try to hand our democracy over to a godless people, what would you list as the attendant liability of general wickedness as a qualification for the people who were to make the effort of governing themselves? That question will, of course, compel us to think straight into some of the great governmental troubles of our very much-troubled hour. The keen question asked us, however, was in the compounded danger of ignorant and godless citizenship in democracy. We might get more forcibly the deep meaning of the question by changing it in analysis. How much less perilous than the other would it be to turn our prized democracy over to an educated godless

people? Ignorant godlessness is to be pitied. Educated godlessness is to be feared.

As one interested in the genuine progress in all good things of the race of mankind I am sure, before such questions as are compelled in all our minds by the simplest suggestions in the lines we have just been considering, that religious education is one of the prime matters of importance before the whole world now. Ignorant godlessness is a stupid, dull, harmless situation. Educated godlessness is a fierce, armed terror. Godly education is a genuine blessing always and everywhere. Education needs religion. Religion needs education. The Church of Jesus Christ has always been a leader in educational conquest. It must never falter in that leadership.

We are constantly asking ourselves to-day as we study the resultant conditions amid which we live, whether or no we are to go into a tomorrow where the same mean national hatreds, that the world has been made victim of so long, will again dictate the breaking of another cruel war. The Christian Church very largely holds the answer to that very important question, but it will require the heroic daring of an unfaltering practice of some of our strongest convictions, and it will require a passion, and also a sacrifice, worthy such conviction. There may be very much in this unideal day of ours for which

we cannot be blamed. We can quite easily call to mind an extended list of things that are indeed bad, and we can agree unanimously that all these things are condemningly bad; and then we can confidently congratulate ourselves in a smug guiltlessness as to their presence in the world. But we cannot out of them arise to face the future before us without being confronted with the sobering fact that the continuance of a to-morrow thus cursed must be accepted with blame upon us. Written across to-morrow stands the liability of our judgment, because in this day of our activity youth is pliable in our hands, and we are actually now within reach of the childhood out of whose maturity to-morrow will be made.

A few years ago a man presented me with a book, one of the most thoughtful summaries of the human cost of the Great War that has yet been written. As the donor gave me the book he startled me with the compelling story of a godly young school-teacher whose short service being cut down by death had yet so securely planted himself into the lives of his pupils that his quenchless influence was still a flame of helpfulness in the little town where he had lived and died, and from whence the gleam had gone out to the world. That teacher, in as obscure a setting as could have been chosen, had gripped the whole of the lives of his pupils, and his spell will never die out there. He is, indeed, a very rich man.

His fortune cannot be ill spent by any careless inheritor. What, of all available things, could be finer than for a man to be able thus to live down all the years in the high and lifting ideals of the growing youth of a town? What could any of us ever set ourselves to do that would compare in privilege to helping here and now weave into the boys and girls about us the high standards of genuine Christian culture.

There is no more essential matter before the nation, the church, and the civilization of tomorrow than the work of Christian education. I do not mean this as a mere plea for the Christian college. I am, however, for the Christian college with all my soul. I want the Christian college, too, to be both Christian and collegiate. I do not desire that either element shall be diminished. There cannot be tolerated among us a carelessness with either essential. The only reason there is for a church college is the religious reason: to teach youth religiously. Not merely to tolerate a religious attitude. Not merely to place about our students some restraints in conduct. I believe in a Christian college in the full collegiate measure of the leadership of our great faith to lead our youth intellectually and with a religious emphasis. Not to tether a single impulse to investigate. Not to pull one curtain before the inquisitive exploration of any truth. Not to muffle one single inquiry

that may arise in their opening minds. Not to close unanswered any question they may care to bring. I only ask, but I do ask all it may mean, that our youth shall be led religiously. Let education and religion walk hand in hand. If Christianity cannot live in the presence of the open mind, it cannot live anywhere. If Christianity cannot meet our youth in fearless leadership, and conduct them into every avenue of research where truth can be traced, then it cannot hold their interest or allegiance, and it should not even aspire so to do. Christianity cannot stultify itself into so cheap, so weak an attitude as to ask an allegiance that would require one closed door. The progress of the Christian faith in the world cannot ever be found in any system of qualified learning that would compromise the idea of free inquiry. Christianity has led the world as far as it has only because it has had no fear of the truth. We must challenge our youth with the call of the open mind. They need not close one window toward truth when they follow Jesus Christ. This thing of our faith was not done in a corner. It will not prosper in ignorance. Truth and God are never in collision. God is truth, and there is no trail of truth that if honestly followed can lead away from him. We need feel no anxiety for the established security of God and Christ. Who am I, a little man, to take upon myself the task to hold God

up, or to keep some other little man from prying him off the throne of the universe? The whole attitude of controversial fear is out of order. If we have a God who is to be rescued and kept secure in his place by little folks such as are we, we have too little a God to worship. It would be hard to find a bit of more wholesome reading for our present day than some of those great declarations of calm Christian faith just issued by Michael Pupin, whose position in the world of science and research will not be disputed. He struck this splendid sentence as summary of his position: "Science has made me a better Christian, and I believe it will make better Christians of all men and women who try to understand its simple, beautiful laws, because they are the laws of God." Religion walks right along with education. Together they are secure. Separated both are in trouble. I am asking as a churchman for the essential place of religion in education.

The distressing evidence of what is being called a crime wave about us is bringing a new focus of attention to the significance of the religious element in our educational program. Religious illiteracy is a phrase of most startling suggestion. "Illiterate" is a term we have heretofore been using only toward the most common and primary matters of education. We have not dared carry it beyond the first rudiments. If a

man can read and write, we have been glad to grant him thereby escape from the dark zone of illiteracy. There is a depressing feeling when we read the statistics of the people whom we class as illiterate. But when you take that dark word and express with it a religious standing, it holds a new and heavier depression, a description of that life that has left religion out, "Some have not the knowledge of God."

I was sitting at a banquet table one evening and before me sat a real representative company of business men of a great and important city of our nation. They were men to whom almost any phase of business was an open book. They knew the markets. They knew stocks. They knew reports. They knew the price of money, and the trend of it for the quotations of to-morrow. I suppose that company of men would have been an expert counsel as to almost any business investment I could have desired to make. The toastmaster of the evening sat beside me and was a man of representative business discernment. He either had just been reading some impressive article, or his mind was careering far away from that banquet table, for he said to me in a startling way as he looked up: "How much do you imagine this fine company of men before you right now really know about religion?" The question certainly found my mind in a very far different direction. I was thinking

in an entirely different realm. I was feeling about in my mind for some attentive line by which I might catch their ears, that I might then be able to say a few fundamental things of my conviction. But a query involving the actual knowledge of representative men in a great industrial community toward religious truth startled me. I did not attempt to make answer to his question. I do not believe he asked it with any expectation of an answer. I am sure he framed it in the form of a confounding question, that he might thus say by implication more than he cared to say by word. His question, however, has not let my thought alone. I have neither been able to answer it nor to dismiss it. The present status of the public knowledge of religion is not a very proud one. Yet here is religion, and if it is anything at all, it is set to concern itself about altogether the most important matter before us. It is, however, a matter least known, and men of representative position in the making of our great age are not startled that they are actually illiterate in it. I wonder if such illiteracy has not some direct bearing upon the whole condition of our age across which can run the great crime wave we have been trying to find some reason for.

Youth is the outstanding word in the statistics we have been gathering about crime. Hideous and constant crimes run across our news

pages carrying the names and pictures of youth. Only a short-gone yesterday the thought of crime was illustrated with a hard-lined villainous looking man. To-day the picture is of a lad. Only in the very last news in my own town came the account of one sent from our courts to the State prison for forty years, which were to be added to the seventeen years he had already been sentenced to serve! and he was only sent thus rather than to a life sentence because of fear of some commutation that might be granted in a future forgetfulness. That lad as he was taken away was to be married in just a few days to a girl of sixteen years. O youth! youth! youth! What is this darkened, staggering way you have taken? Recently one of our great prisons gave out some startling figures. One-half the prisoners confined there were under twenty-five years of age. Eighty-seven per cent of their prisoners were under thirty years of age. All this staggering evidence, too, is based upon major crimes. Fifteen years ago in our country the age average of our prisoners was thirty-two. To-day we set the figure at twenty-two. Sixteen years of age seems to be the period at which the largest number of first crimes are committed. I note all this now, in order to startle all our attention to the stunning fact of religious illiteracy of our youth. Youth is smart to-day. Indeed, the youth of no generation in the world's history has been so well

informed as is the youth of this day. If, however, they be illiterate religiously they are dangerously ignorant.

A few years ago the Sunday School Board of the Methodist Episcopal Church produced some figures about our schools toward our churches which compelled some very earnest attention. We were amazed to learn what a large proportion of the boys and girls who were actually offered our religious influence escaped our endeavors. A very small percentage of the enrolled children in our Sunday schools were brought into the church, and still that scant part of our schools formed the large bulk of our church increase. Methodism's discovery was the cause of kindred inquiry by other denominations. The large proportion of our losses happened at that period from twelve to twenty years of age. That is the very period of life where the lasting impressions on life are largely being made. Exactly at that point must the church be most careful in its work. We should be very much concerned when a boy or a girl drops out of our classes or slips away from the pew in church. There is no more intrusted religious worker in all the world than the one whom the church allows to sit with and to teach the childhood in its schools. The immediate to-morrow of the church and of the world is in the hands of those who are dealing with our children. O you Sun-

day-school teachers, and you fathers and mothers of the church, take careful heed of that vital fact!

You fathers! I personally believe you are most to be blamed in this matter. You cannot hope to make safe impress upon that lad of yours at fifteen years of age by once during the year taking him with you to some Fathers and Sons Banquet, to blow tin horns, and inflate toy balloons, and eat a good meal and endure a jazz band. Just at that very strategic spot in that boy's life, some heroic and very high-grade living is needed on the part of the father. Demonstrations of the real high motives of life are called for. Those boys know that. They detect motives. They appreciate ideals. They hear callings. They are sensitive to those noble convictions a man can have toward the great moral things of life and destiny. I am ready to dare an answer to a keen editorial I read in one of our great metropolitan papers recently. The editor would not venture further than to leave his conviction tangled in the form of a question. He asked, "Is there any connection between a crime-wave to-day and a serious loss in the Sunday-school enrollment of eight years ago?" I believe there is. I further believe that it runs into an even more searching situation than that. It should compel some very thoughtful attention to our whole school system, from which we, in an embarrassed liberty, have

been forced to erase about all religious influence, though anti-religious influences that may invade the essential zone of impression receive no like treatment. We tolerate religious misrepresentation and allow no real religious impress. We have thus strengthened the hands of a weak minority among us, and allowed them thus to strike every phase of religious influence from our schools. Do not think I fail to appreciate all the separation of church and state has come to mean in government. But know you, beyond all that, this fatal fact for a tolerant democracy, that this very hour in America there are seven children out of every ten, under twenty-five years of age, who are receiving no religious instruction whatever. That is an undermining fact for a great democracy supposedly Christian. Can we wonder that we are constantly piling up a mass of new statistics of conduct that carry a startle to every idea of security we may covet for our nation? We cannot, as a nation that must stand or fall on the character of its citizenship, gaze complacently upon such facts. Absolutely everything is involved. When we find our criminals are recruited from youth, let us do something more about it than fret ourselves as to just how long a girl's hair should be, or as to just how much material should be involved in the design of her skirt. We will never solve the threatening problems of our difficult day on the glaring

lives of external criticisms we seem so easily to adopt.

There is incumbent upon all of us in the Christian Church to-day the great duty of setting ourselves to help ingrain into our growing children all those great ideals that will hold like great anchors over beyond testing temptations. If the youth of to-day is faltering, let us now make sure that the youth of to-morrow shall catch step nobly again. Doubtless the great duty of bringing religious education to the youth and childhood within its reach is the prime duty of every Church of Jesus Christ to-day.

What, oh my country, what might the childhood of a religiously illiterate generation make of you? We would call now for religion in education, and for education in religion. May God help us to save our country from religious illiteracy!

X

EXCESS VICTORY

"In all these things we are more than conquerors."
—*Romans 8. 37.*

"More than conquerors" is the prominent clause that caught my attention in that passage of Scripture, and seemed to set in capital letters the whole verse. I remember having seen posted somewhere, just after the great commission of peace had finished its work and closed the red chapter of the World War, a judgment of someone about the ultimate findings which can never be forgotten, and which seemed to dare an estimate against it all that was bitterly disappointing in these words, "We won the war, but we lost the peace." The sentence is not easy to shake out of memory. Won to lose. We were mere conquerors. I wonder if that was really all.

All down the centuries, whence the Christian faith has been putting flavor in the world's relationships, the Bible has been carrying this significant phrase, "More than conquerors." Just where does the excess come in? Ordinarily I had come to think that when I had conquered some particular matter I was thence ready to

start on a new chapter of conquest. The conquered matter was completed in its meaning at the victory.

I suppose many a victory has been dissipated simply because there was nothing more about it than victory. Just victory, as we ordinarily call victory, may carry the lurking liability of ultimate failure. I remember a man who won a college contest in oratory. It was the first one I had ever witnessed or heard, or whatever it is we do at a college contest. I thought then that was the greatest victory available to the ordinary man, and I put back, but securely in my head and soul, the purpose to win that victory some day. I saw the victor. I helped carry him about on the shoulders of admiring supporters. He wore great overshoes to insure him against the liability of a cold. He wrapped about his eloquent neck a heavy wool muffler. He held his hand carefully before his mouth to prevent any rude rush of cold air against his tenderly eloquent vocal machinery. He passed out of sight so. I have not heard of him since. The last I ever knew of him was that he was a conqueror. He lacked that excess victory which might have made a conqueror then into a man of value to-day.

It is no sure sign, even in this war-trampled world of ours to-day, that we are actually conquerors because we may have hammered our

enemy into submission, and in some huzzah-maddened triumph shall have run up our flag on a very high pole. Victory is a matter into which we should look carefully. "To the victors belong the spoils," is a memorized phrase of participant greed which perhaps describes very often all the victor has had. Victory with spoils has spoiled much victory. Out of all the strife and conflict our world has grown used to, it is not possible for religion to preserve to itself very much high respect if it poses merely as a conqueror, unless it can write the word "conqueror" in an enlarged meaning. We must find some sure way to set an excess victory over beyond triumph.

When Lord Nelson, that almost emblematic human figure of victory, stood looking out over the intoxicating scene spread before him at the great Battle of the Nile, he said to someone standing near, as the conclusive action was just finishing, "Victory is not a name strong enough for such a scene." In some much higher sense than the great naval hero had in his victorious mind just then, we must find some genuine way of writing into conquest something more than conquering.

The flavor of excess victory runs through the Christian faith—victory beyond victory, the conquest of victory itself, making the victor a conqueror. You must walk life out with a long

noble stride if you keep step with this great old Book of God. I am forever amazed at it. All that the oncoming ages of men have been able to do with the Bible has been to brighten it to new and ever better meaning. The world doesn't outrun it. Life doesn't desert it. Discovery does not discredit it. Progress does not forsake it. Life forever polishes to newer meaning the fine things here written, many of which we never understood, until we discovered by some great advancement, by which we imagined we had passed beyond all we had ever had, that we, the rather, had but thus discovered a hidden meaning in the Book. Thus I am sure we are to find the resultant revelation of this strenuous day of ours, that sometimes thinks in its overplus of daring adventure it has outrun the pages of God's word. Men, because of a mad sort of an ambition to be rich, or powerful, or smart, or happy, have not infrequently thought they could toss aside the Bible that has stood in a stubborn opposition to their ideals, only to find that the way written here is the God-way, after all, and that Saul was not the only man who has found painfully the uselessness of kicking against the pricks. I am sure that out of this day of ours, and over beyond all its controversies, that so frequently involve what we believe to be the very fundamentals of our faith, we will come enriched with new treasures of our inheritance, and jubilant in the

adequacy of our faith for all the extremities life can ever come to know.

"More than conquerors." There is an overstep in that which I much like in this victorious-feeling day of ours. What if we are conquerors! That may be a low-cry victory. It is only in that out-reaching "more" that I am to possess to myself the feeling that I am really victorious. I saw a picture of a great brute-framed pugilist. He stood with big, hard, clinched fists above his antagonist, whom he had beaten to within a few throbs of his life's end. As he awaited eagerly the slow counting referee, and with determined eye set upon his prostrate victim sprawled on the floor at his feet, ready quickly to beat him more if he dared stagger to his uncertain feet, he was a victor. That was victory. But, my Christian friends, I refuse the brutish figure as acceptable. We must write victory with more noble meaning. "More than conqueror." The excess victory. Life is sensing there its challenged onward way.

1. We are more than conquerors, with the accent on the accomplished fact. We must accept the responsibility of the present tense of our claim. This is not now a place for us to hide our imperfections behind a hopefulness that reaches on down some coming ideal to-morrow. Christianity must speak boldly in real terms of victory now. Much shallow but in some ways

very insidious criticism of our Christianity has been framed in the claim that it is a futurized religion. It gazes on ahead. They try to tell us we stand amid matters of a low to-day and offer as a relief to it all the hope of a very high to-morrow; that we really care but little about what must be endured now, for the long-focused reason that we will most certainly escape into a better heaven somewhere, sometime.

As a preacher of the great gospel of our Christ I rejoice to say in the midst of everything life is now, and before whatever life may yet become here in the great struggle to free itself from the power and dominion of sin, that Christianity presents a plan and lays a claim now in this present world to the triumphant conquest against evil. This is our defiant declaration of a delivering and triumphant faith that proceeds to ride squarely into the face of whatever life may mean, and waits, not for some fairer expected to-morrow in which we can find a victory that shall be easier to possess, but that, rather, proposes to possess that victory now. And everything that big word "now" means to-day must be included in our claim. We are looking for a victory now. We mean to write that fact squarely up against every difficulty we know.

I have an interlocking faith. I believe profoundly in the hereafter. I believe likewise in the here. I have a confidence in a Christianity

that can and will build here upon this world a genuine city of our God. In order to do it, it will, to be sure, require the change of a great many citizens. But the very power of the gospel of Christ is a power to transform sinners into saints and to make here and now citizens who can live lives of virtue. I am profoundly grateful for the confidence in Christianity which I cherish in my heart. There is a much larger note in our religion than a submissive interpretation of hope.

Do not mistake me. I admire hope. I believe in hope, a deathless hope, an active hope, an aggressive hope. Hope does not sit down with a stringless harp on a dead world and merely endure. I believe in a hope that will restring that broken harp. That will make strings out of unexpected material. We need to take out of the popular conception of hope the monopolizing idea of desperation. Hope is not desperation. Hope is a triumphant confidence in the ultimate outcome of the things of God. The whole world, at this very moment, is in need of the shock of a religion upon it that carries the presumptive sense of an immediate victory. Things are all unstrung. Tribulations are about. Temptations are rampant. Afflictions are desperate. We are surrounded by men and women whose lives are such real tragedies that they need an immediate message. Not a message that

deals with some possible mere escape from such a life, but a message that bears upon an actual and an immediate reformation of all such a life can mean. The thing this present-day world needs most in its sin-struck situation is not a calm exhortation to endurance until a better life hereafter shall afford an escape from it all, but, rather, a reformative power of transformation that will actually make living here and now more tolerable. God forbid that I shall weakly live my feeble way through such a life and such an age as this of ours is, and leave behind me when I am gone no better testimony than that maybe some better day, in some sweet by-and-by, we will see righteousness victorious. If I had no better idea of the reformative power of my Christ than that I would not dare preach to such a day as I know this day to be. I would be afraid to preach a little religion equipped with a program of mere escape, to a world as suffering and sinful as I know this one to be. My faith is in a constructive victory now.

I remember so well a gruesome sight I saw one day during the Great War from the deck of our zig-zagging ship as we were making our anxious way through a stretch of dangerous sea along the Irish coast. The lifeboats were all made ready and hung over the sides of the ship. Everyone kept sharp lookout for the dreaded periscope. I saw something floating just ahead

of us and as the ship almost pushed it out of the way I saw the dead body of a man go floating by. The ship could not stop for a dead man. Living men were on board and in danger. The ship plunged on, and I watched as far as I could see that dead man bobbing across those cold waves. But this was the thing that wrought its way into my thinking: clinging to the poor, pale dead body was a life preserver, which had been seized by him in an hour of sudden peril when his ship had gone down. I do not know how long that so-called life preserver may have helped him to breast off a cold sea in hope of some possible rescue. I do know it was not enough to deliver him.

The kind of a religion we must deliver to men now is not some mere aid for a short season of struggle, but a lifting, plunging, port-bound ship that will bring them triumphantly through storm and every danger to an eternal harbor. I believe in a triumphant faith now. I do not believe there is anything too hard for our Christ. I do not believe there is a man or a woman anywhere who cannot know the complete present victory of this salvation. I do not believe this wicked sin-scarred world has ever gotten itself into any trouble out of which this religion of Christ's cannot deliver it. I would preach such confidence squarely before individual, society, or nation, sure that it will prove the deliverance. I

believe the Christian solution is the only solution there is for this world. I am sure it will save the individual. I am sure it will make peace and keep peace among the troubled nations of the world. I want to see this world try Jesus Christ. It is not ours merely to match this day with a hope-blazoned promise that some day we shall escape from this distressing tumult into an everlasting peace beyond the blazing stars of heaven. The rather are we asking now for the establishment of such a peace here. We are conquerors! Let us be heroic enough to write the proper tense into all the declaration of such a faith may mean, and fit it squarely to our day. Thank God for the present tense of our faith. We are conquerors. Let us act so.

2. The plus statement of our text yet remains for emphasis. It is that most characteristic element of our triumph which will keep it distinctly Christian, making it more than triumph. Triumphant might easily be merely an egotistical brag. More than triumphant carries a constructive value. We are to do much more than to win victory. We are to possess victory in excess. Religion must do much more for us than to merely save us. This does not in any manner lose sight of the value, beyond any computation, of saving your soul. But your religion must, in saving you, so direct your secured life as to make you henceforth a double value among men.

You are not worthy of your salvation if you simply sit henceforth an exhibition of salvage. There is very much a saved man or woman can yet do in this world.

It is not enough that a man shall have been rescued from the terrible curse of drunkenness, even great that such a rescue in itself certainly is. See, however, Sam Hadley, as his redeemed life became a tireless ministry. It is not enough that a soul shall have been saved from the power and dominion of dreadful sin. Doctor Gunsaulus used to have a very devoted friend whose rich, rare voice has sung with intense experience the power of Christian appeal. She had been saved through the efforts of the great preacher, and became truly an outstanding singer of sacred song. She would go anywhere to sing for him. He has told me many times, as we have talked about Christian appeal, how the pulse of her experience, throbbing along the notes of her song, would win the opening way for his message. One day he was floundering about with his sermon and could not seem to get the essential note. In desperation he turned to the choir and calling the singer out said, "Can't you sing something?" She stood there, sweet singer, cultured artist, rich interpreter, and all thrilling with deep experience sang, "Where Is My Wandering Boy To-night?" The power of the song swept across the audience like a wind across a

field of ripe wheat. And when the great preacher stood again to speak the way was opened. It is not enough that you are saved. You are saved to serve. Your salvation is conscription. "More than conquerors." To merely repulse the enemy is to triumph, but to capture his guns, and drive him out of all his strongholds sounds more like an excess victory. That is the victory I crave. Of course there is a tired and dogged triumph possible for us to have to-day by persisting unfalteringly through every difficulty of a difficult day and preserving to its end the faith we hold in our hearts. There be those among us who seem to believe such a victory is about all we can expect to bring out of such a time as is this in which we now live. The conspiracy set against our faith, they declare, is so great that mere survival will be victory enough. Such an attitude makes no appeal to me. The challenge of increased difficulty but brightens the degree of triumph. We should, out of unusually difficult situations, achieve unusually brilliant victories. We need a transcendent triumph now. Our faith should come forth now even more stalwart beyond every challenge.

More than conquerors! The overreach of our Christian conquest. We are indeed glad for the experience we know in our own personal salvation. We would lift our sincere praise to Him who hath lifted us up from the mire and clay

and established our feet upon the rock. Such a fact can never fade from our sense of appreciation. But all this is too small a measure upon which to set a very abounding testimony. We dare not within such close horizons individualize our triumph, nor would we seem thus to taint with selfishness the fuller meaning of our salvation. We are not satisfied to merely be set up upon a rock. We yearn to do more than merely arrive at heaven at last. We would be more than conquerors. We would dismiss from our lives every selfishness that may have dared to dwell with the experience of our salvation and be saviours of others also. We would help others find the sure way. We would go helpfully all the way to the conclusion of God's greatest purpose. Victory! Victory! But victory with excess. Victory to be Christian must be constructively triumphant.

As we catch step with our conquering Christ, he who comes giving life, and giving it more abundantly, we will find ourselves compelled to walk the more-than-conqueror's way, and triumphantly triumphant at last, will enter the eternal gates of his glory in the assurance that we shall have spent our strength on a larger cause than our own personal salvation—excess victors.

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